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PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

July 2012

Vol. 117, No. 7



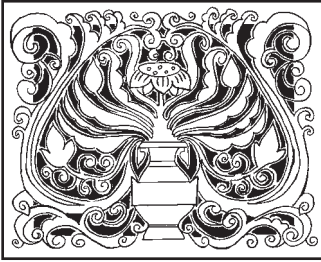
PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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Vol. 117, No. 7
July 2012

Contents



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INTERNET EDITION AT:

www.advaitaashrama.org

Cover photo: 'Power of Light'
by Atashi Chatterjee

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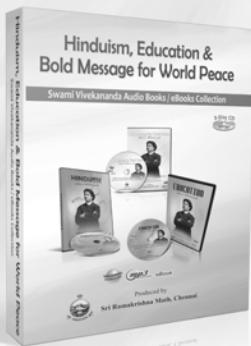
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Origin of the Universe

July 2012
Vol. 117, No. 7

तस्य ह वा एतस्यैवं पश्यत एवं मन्वानस्यैवं विजानत आत्मतः प्राण आत्मत
आशात्मतः स्मर आत्मत आकाश आत्मतस्तेज आत्मत आप आत्मत आविर्भावति-
रोभावावात्मतोऽन्नमात्मतो बलमात्मतो विज्ञानमात्मतो ध्यानमात्मतश्चित्तमात्मतः
सङ्कल्प आत्मतो मन आत्मतो वागात्मतो नामात्मतो मन्त्रा आत्मतः कर्माण्यात्मत
एवेदः सर्वमिति ॥

Of that man indeed who sees thus (the all-pervading Reality), who reflects thus, who realizes thus, the *prana* springs from the Atman, hope springs from the Atman, memory springs from the Atman, space springs from the Atman, fire springs from the Atman, water springs from the Atman, appearance and disappearance spring from the Atman, food springs from the Atman, strength springs from the Atman, understanding springs from the Atman, meditation springs from the Atman, intelligence springs from the Atman, will springs from the Atman, mind springs from the Atman, speech springs from the Atman, name springs from the Atman, text springs from the Atman, rites springs from the Atman. All these indeed springs from the Atman.

(*Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.26.1)

स यथोर्णनाभिस्तन्तुनोच्चरेत् यथाग्नेः क्षुद्रा विस्फुलिङ्गा व्युच्चरन्ति
एवमेवास्मादात्मनः सर्वे प्राणाः सर्वे लोकाः सर्वे देवाः सर्वाणि भूतानि व्युच्चरन्ति
तस्योपनिषत् सत्यस्य सत्यमिति प्राणा वै सत्यम् तेषामेष सत्यम् ॥

As a spider moves along the thread (it produces), and as from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from this Atman emanate all organs, all worlds, all gods, and all beings. Its secret name (Upanishad) is 'the Truth of truth'. Prana is truth, and It is the Truth of that.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20)

THIS MONTH

Immortality through Consciousness shows how self-awareness or self-consciousness distinguishes humankind from most species and is also a gateway to yoga.

Yoga defines the very essence of religion, spirituality, and higher states of consciousness. Brahmachari Dayaghanachaitanya, of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, traces the development of yoga from Vedic times to the present day in **Origins of Yoga**.

Sallekhanā, fasting unto death, is an ancient practice in Jainism that is today misunderstood and labelled ethically and legally controversial. In ***Sallekhanā, Euthanasia, and Suicide: Moral Distinctions***, Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharyya, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara, Hooghly, clears the misconceptions regarding the practice's significance.



The Geometry Box is a moving real life story of a brave woman called Madhu Vani and how her devotion to Holy Mother changed her life. The story is narrated by Dr Alpana Ghosh, former Head, Department of Chemistry, Ranchi Women's College.

Swami Tathagatananda, minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of New York, describes in **Sri Ramakrishna and Kali** the mystic meaning and iconography of Kali and the goddess's manifestation in this age.

Social exclusion has been the Achilles's heel in humankind's progress. Dr Jashobanta Roy, Head, Department of Philosophy at Radhamadhab College, Silchar, shows in **Shankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism: Model of Social Inclusion** how this socioreligious movement in Assam overcame exclusionism.

Dr Amrita M Salm, retired educator and a long time devotee of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, writes in **Mother of Mayavati: The Story of Charlotte Sevier – II** how the Seviere were inspired to dedicate their lives to start the Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati. This part of the story is from the second chapter of her forthcoming book.



In the eighth part of **Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels** Somenath Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, describes Swamiji's voyage from New York to Le Harve, France, on *La Champagne*, and in brief his visit to Paris as well as his trip on the legendary *Orient Express*.

The fifth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhibh: Attaining Self-dominion** by the eighteenth century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, explains that actions cannot lead to the highest goal, only knowledge can.

Immortality through Consciousness

SELF-AWARENESS OR self-consciousness plays an important role in human development. It is dormant in newborns, but starts developing and is noticed in toddlers. As children grow, self-awareness becomes more and more refined. Individuals become aware of their own emotional states, natures, and actions, and are also able to discern the same in others. As awareness matures into the sophisticated mechanism of cognition, humans can interpret behaviour and morality, show judgement, empathy, and restraint, and also know how they stand in relation to their own standards and those of others. In every complex movement of life, self-awareness propels humans into performing amazing mental and physical activities with ease. It is also responsible for all the other phenomena that the body and the mind are capable of, even phenomena that defy ordinary explanation and are labelled as altered states of consciousness.

Another aspect with major implication for humans is that individual consciousness can visualize its own past and study it, besides visualizing the future, like one's own death. Death's uncertainty and terror has made humankind prepare in various ways for its inevitability by producing theology, rituals, and institutions that attenuate its impact. Somehow, death is unwelcome and feared, for consciousness cannot face its own termination. The reason is that from deep within consciousness its own immortality is reflected in individual awareness.

The process of life is death; one has to die every moment in order to live. Swami Vivekananda

says: 'The lamp is constantly burning out, and that is its life. If you want to have life, you have to die every moment for it. Life and death are only different expressions of the same thing looked at from different standpoints; they are the falling and the rising of the same wave, and the two form one whole.' Most religions solved the problem of death with an eternal heaven or an eternal hell, but the Upanishads taught about Reality, which transcends individual consciousness, death, heavens, and hells. Other streams of thought in India looked at the universe holistically and instead of believing in death as terrible and the end of everything, conceptualized it to produce the iconography of the Divine Mother Kali. She embodies life and death, and Mother can be approached without fear and awe to release us from the delusion of the frightening duality of life and death. The process of approaching Mother is through our inner awareness, which is like a door, and the key to open that door is yoga.

Almost all human activities are merely on the surface of consciousness, while we are not aware of its dynamic nature below and above this line. Plumbing its dimensions opens the vaster aspects of the personality and also the secrets of the universe. Various levels of consciousness have various levels of power. Yoga is the science of peeling off layer after layer of individual consciousness wherein the secrets of life, death, religion, human destiny, and God are perceived in its fullness. Swamiji says: 'Raja-Yoga proposes to start from the internal world, to study internal nature, and, through that, control the whole—both internal


and external. It is a very old attempt. India has been its special stronghold, but it was also attempted by other nations.'

As we enter the vast dimensions of consciousness, also created by Mother, we are led to Shiva, absolute Consciousness. Shiva is the god of yoga and yogis. Externally, Mother's lila of creation, preservation, and destruction, is played out on the breast of Shiva. Internally, she leads consciousness through the kundalini Shakti to its goal: Shiva dwelling in the *sahasrara*, thousand-petalled centre at the top of the head.

Almost all of us have the habit of comparing our early days of simplicity with today's complexities and complications. We classify human history in this same way. Undoubtedly, individual and social life is becoming increasingly complex, but we forget that all the species alive today have evolved through tremendous struggles, fighting complex and impossible odds to survive. Till a few years back most humans were selfishly thinking that only they among all the species possess this unique self-awareness. Now we know better, like some of the ancients, and we are humbled by new discoveries in the animal and vegetal kingdoms.

Swamiji says that struggle is the sign of life, and that the more we struggle the more we know. It seems to be a paradox that the more we evolve self-consciousness the more we suffer and the more we know. Suffering is experienced when we obstruct the process of consciousness guided by our selfishness. In reality what is driving evolution is consciousness, and the more it evolves, the more it takes us through greater struggles. We are like mere puppets being used by consciousness, which is seeking its fulfilment. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* a devotee objected to Sri Ramakrishna saying: 'It may be Her sweet will; but it is death to us.' The Master replies: 'But who are you? It is the Divine Mother who

has become all this. It is only as long as you do not know Her that you say "I", "I". In the mystical language of the yogis, Kali, who embodies relative consciousness and dwells in every being, is trying to reach out to Shiva, absolute consciousness, from which she had been separated. The separation from Shiva made creation possible. This Shakti is like a stream rushing to the ocean, a stream that will drag things away from its path and cut its way to the goal. Those who try to stop the current of the serpent-power suffer; those who make way for the power are carried along to its fulfilment. The deliberate method of making way for the kundalini to reach Shiva is yoga, and its basis is morality. Although it is true that Shakti will ultimately free us, till then it makes us go through the tedious process of struggle. The goal of self-consciousness and of the whole relative world is to seek the absolute.

Ordinarily, consciousness is enmeshed with the senses, and the feeling of self-consciousness acts like a barrier. But once we are conscious that the self belongs to the Divine Mother, our bondage ceases and we attain immortality. Every human being, without exception, has the potential to be a yogi. From this point of view, any form of social exclusivism is wrong, as it keeps people from approaching Mother and understanding the nature of life and death as well as the secret of the universe. Mother is embodied in the world and can be approached with prayers and love. She listens and responds. Devotees pray to her not just because she removes the obstacles to yoga, but because she is in essence yoga. The highest love, knowledge, and bliss of Mother are reflected in us. Death and karma, which appeared so menacing, is now seen as the Mother. The yogi or yogini acquires absolute consciousness and becomes immortal by breaking the rod of time and sees not the duality of life and death but the duality of Shiva and Shakti, who are in essence one. 

Origins of Yoga

Brahmachari Dayaghanachaitanya

YOGA, WHICH ORIGINATED in an Indian religious milieu, has taken various forms all over the world, and the popularity of Eastern religions is more due to yoga than their particular philosophies. Today, removed from its original settings, yoga is mainly adapted to enhance physical and mental health. However, at the core of its variations and modifications one can still find yoga's original spiritual principles. Discerning people are increasingly becoming aware that physical and mental problems are generally caused by deep spiritual unrest and that yoga is one of the best solutions in neutralizing this unrest. Such people are gradually moving towards the spiritual side of yoga.

A set of well-defined and established practices that lead a sincere aspirant to spiritual freedom constitutes yoga. Swami Vivekananda says: 'All the orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy have one goal in view, the liberation of the soul through perfection. The method is by Yoga. The word Yoga covers an immense ground, but both the Sankhya and the Vedanta Schools point to Yoga in some form or other.'¹ Yoga is not attributed to a single founder but 'at a certain period of Indian history, this one subject of man and his mind absorbed all their interest' (2.20). The different stages and practices of yoga were arrived at through centuries of experimentation with every possible mental phenomenon and honed by many generations of yogis. Patanjali, by the second century BCE, collated all the various methods within a system to create the *Yoga Sutra* in its distinctive and classical format.

From the theological standpoint, yoga is as ancient as the world. Sri Krishna declares in the Bhagavadgita:

I imparted this imperishable yoga to Vivasvan (the sun god). Vivasvan taught this to Manu (the first born) and Manu transmitted this to Ikshvaku (first king of the solar dynasty); the king-sages knew this (yoga) which was received thus in regular succession. That yoga, O destroyer of foes (Arjuna), is now lost owing to a long lapse of time; that ancient yoga itself, which is this, has been taught to you by me today, considering that you are my devotee and friend, for this yoga is a profound secret.²

Yoga in the Vedas

Yoga, as a body knowledge and technique aimed at refining and expanding consciousness, attained prominence during the Vedic period, even before the term acquired its customary meaning. Although these practices were initially devoid of specific philosophical and technical frameworks, they formed the basis of later philosophical structures within Hinduism.

Vedic literature indicates that many rishis were conversant with certain methods that, when followed diligently, were known to transform consciousness to higher levels. Some of the methods were known as: *dhīh*, insight; *diksha*, initiation; *tapas*, austerity; and *yajna*, sacrifice. *Yajna* engaged Vedic society and played a crucial role in developing metaphysical concepts. People, metaphorically speaking, questioned, searched, and scanned their sacrificial altars for answers to the great questions of life and the

universe. As answers came, the ordinary sacrificial act was transformed into a mystical act of cosmic significance. The Gita echoes this idea: 'Know that action has the Veda as its origin; the Veda has the Immutable (Brahman) as its source. Hence, the all-pervading and eternal Veda is based on sacrifice' (3.15). The Creator created the universe through a yajna and offered himself in it; thus, the daily yajna became a replication of this supreme act.

Yajna, besides its sacred significance, demanded physical and mental diligence in order to build altars, light fires, recite right mantras, and pour oblations. These disciplines became sacrificial rules aimed at integrating, or yoking, the self of the sacrificer with the cosmic Self. The disciplines became the basis of later yogic disciplines. Moreover, the various yajnas were performed in accordance with *ritam*, the universal cosmic order; *tapas*; and *upasanas*, meditations. In fact, every yajna had this counterpart of mental activity, otherwise it would not be considered yajna at all.

The secret of the Vedic rishis' towering personalities was their power of *tapas*. The ordinary meaning of 'tapas' is 'heat', but *tapas* is a course in self-discipline through the observance of *brahmacharya* and obligatory *indriya nigraha*, subjugation of the senses. The word is technically understood as: '*Manasascha indriyanam chaikagram paramam tapah*'; one-pointedness of the mind and the senses is supreme *tapas*. Every Vedic activity was generally pursued after *diksha*, making one competent to enter into the subtleties of spiritual life. It is through rigorous *tapas*, aided by *upasana* with Saguna Brahman as the object of meditation, the chanting of sacred and mystic mantras, and the performance of specific rituals, that the sacrificer transcends the body-mind complex and attains a state of oneness with the cosmic Deity.

This introspection into the true nature of Reality, manifested through the microcosm as well as the macrocosm, is denoted by the word *dhīh*. The outer expression of this profound insight later issues forth in the form of rediscovering more mantras and hymns. This proto-yoga of the rishis contained many of the elements that characterize later yoga systems: ethics, control of the senses, concentration, sexual continence, austerity, recitation of mantras, devotional invocation, and self-sacrifice.

Yoga in the Upanishads

As Vedic society progressed and rituals became cumbersome and expensive for many, one finds in the Upanishads that some rishis have internalized Vedic rituals through meditation and contemplation. This was the real beginning of nascent yoga traditions and was possible because the ground was already prepared through long physical and mental discipline. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* begins with the process of internalizing the famous *ashvamedha yajna*, horse sacrifice. Acharya Shankara, in his commentary says: 'The utility of this meditation concerning the horse sacrifice is this: those who are not entitled to this sacrifice will get the same result through this meditation itself.'³ This internalization of yajnas into spiritual practices is also illustrated in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, when it refers to *antaram agnihotram*, the inner fire sacrifice.⁴ The deeper the rishis internalized universal concepts, the more they came in touch with Reality, which is beyond all concepts and all *desha-kala-nimitta*, time-space-causation. The external world then appeared as a faint shadow of Reality. As a consequence, the development of an intense sense of renunciation of desires with the purpose of cutting through all bondages and attaining bliss, arose in the rishis. The process of the sacrifice of the lower self for

attaining unity with the higher Self is the central theme of the Upanishads.

Upasana became the chief means of attaining transcendental knowledge. The esoteric teachings of the Upanishads, however, was not for everybody but imparted only to competent disciples who already had years of training in internalizing concepts regarding God, creation, cosmic law, and yajnas. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* is one of the finest example in which one finds various *vidyas*, meditations, and upasanas describing the process of internalizing old sacrificial rituals into metaphysical concepts. The rishi Ghora Angirasa explains to Krishna, son of Devaki, that 'austerity, charity, sincerity, non-injuring, and speaking of truth are his dakshinas, sacrificial gifts'.⁵ Teachings like this show that later yoga ethics in the form of *yama* and *niyama*, restraints, as basic steps of spiritual life were current in the Upanishads. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* devotes much of its sections to the discussion of various forms of *vidyas*.⁶ In his introduction to this Upanishad, Acharya Shankara explains upasana as: 'Establishing a

continuous flow of similar modifications of the mind in relation to some object as presented by the scriptures, (and) uninterrupted by any foreign idea. ... These meditations that are such become helpful to the nondualistic realisation, by way of presenting a glimpse of the reality of Brahman through the purification of the mind, and they are easy to practice because they are based on some palpable object.'⁷

One of the earliest references of the term yoga is found as *yoga-atma* in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Acharya Shankara comments on the term thus: '*Yogah* is conjunction, concentration. It is the *ātmā*, self (the middle part), as it were.'⁸ The *Katha Upanishad* deals explicitly with yoga in many of its teachings. It propounds the doctrine called *adhyatma yoga*, 'concentration of the mind on the Self after withdrawing it from the outer objects' (1.146). In order to illustrate the process the Upanishad draws a parallel by referring to the body as a chariot and describing the subduing of the senses, horses, through the mind, which are the reins in the hands of the enlightened charioteer, the purified intellect, while



the Self is the passenger (1.163–7). It speaks of the various *nadis*, nerves (1.231), and also about the object of meditation (1.232). Moreover, in very definite words it speaks of yoga: ‘They consider that keeping of the senses steady as yoga. One becomes vigilant at that time, for yoga is subject to growth and decay’ (1.224).

In the *Katha Upanishad* one finds both the Upanishadic reality known as Brahman and the Sankhya philosophy’s concept of Purusha (1.203)—later yoga philosophy, it must be remembered, is built on Sankhya philosophy. The Upanishad also describes sadhana as a return to one’s true nature in an ascending gradation of seven levels, which comprise the hierarchy of existence: ‘The sense-objects are higher than the senses, and mind is higher than the sense-objects; but the intellect is higher than the mind, and the Great Soul is higher than the intellect’ (1.168). ‘The Unmanifest is higher than Mahat; the Puruṣa is higher than the Unmanifested. There is nothing higher than the Puruṣa. He is the culmination, he is the highest goal’ (1.169).

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* teachings representing future yoga tradition are also found; for instance: ‘Taking hold of the bow, the great weapon familiar in the Upanishads, one should fix on it an arrow sharpened with meditation. Drawing the string, O good-looking one, hit that very target that is the Imperishable, with the mind absorbed in its thought’ (2.125).

As one studies the later Upanishads, one finds sublime metaphysics invariably mixed with concrete references to yoga. By this time the word dhyana, meditation, has become current in the literature. In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* innumerable passages referring to yoga are discernibly crystalizing. ‘By practising the yoga of meditation they [sages] realised the power of the Deity Himself, hidden

by its own effects.’⁹ The second chapter of this Upanishad gives elaborate instructions for the practice of meditation such as ideal external conditions; asana, posture; *pranayama*, control of the *prana*; *dharana*, concentration; and of course dhyana, along with the signs of perfection in these practices. But the scripture also cautions that these signs should not be confused with liberation. The supreme goal is not mystical visions but realization of the ultimate Reality: ‘I know this great Person who is resplendent like the sun and is beyond darkness. By knowing Him alone one transcends death; there is no other path to go by’ (130).

The *Maitrayani Upanishad* presents a far more developed and systematic portrayal of yoga by introducing many ideas and concepts upon which the Yoga philosophy of Patanjali develops. According to this Upanishad, the Atman can be realized through knowledge, austerity, and deep concentration and realization is explained in terms of the union of the lower self with the transcendent Self. It also expounds the *shadanga-yoga*, six-fold yoga: *pranayama*; *pratyahara*, withdrawing the senses, dhyana; *dharana*; *tarka*, logic; and samadhi.¹⁰ Excluding *tarka* one obtains five out of the eight-limbs of Patanjali’s yoga.¹¹ Some of the physiological theories of later yoga also begin to appear in the sixth chapter, along with meditation on the mystical syllable ‘Aum’. Apart from the *Maitrayani Upanishad* there are about ten Upanishads, popularly called Yoga Upanishads, that deal with aspects of yoga.¹² However, the tradition of yoga, in its classical sense, would not emerge until several centuries later.

Yoga in the Bhagavadgita

Yoga reaches its zenith and is most comprehensively taught in the Gita. For thousands of years this scripture has inspired the world. Each of

the eighteen chapters is a type of yoga, and the colophons at the end of the chapters declare it to be a *yoga shastra*, yoga scripture. Many consider that every shloka is a teaching on yoga, and some will go even further and say that each word is pregnant with the meaning of yoga. Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna to work 'established in yoga'¹³ and to 'become a yogi' (6.46). Swami Ranganathananda says: 'If you ask what Śrī Kṛṣṇa is going to advise you, I will say this: He is whispering in your ear, and in everybody's ear, "Be a *yogī*, Be a *yogī*; that is your birthright. You are realizing what is already there, merely hidden within you. Spirituality is your birthright. Try to realize your birthright." That is the message Śrī Kṛṣṇa conveys to every person.'¹⁴

By teaching different categories of yoga Sri Krishna brings tremendous dynamism and appeal to the earlier esoteric philosophies, making them practical. The Gita is called *amba*, mother, and just as Sri Ramakrishna says that a mother prepares different dishes to suit the appetites and digestive capacities of different children, so does the Gita cater to everyone accordingly. Swamiji says: 'Our various Yogas do not conflict each other; each of them leads us to the same goal and makes us perfect.'¹⁵ Sri Krishna was a great harmonizer and modernizer of various ancient ideals and teachings prevalent in India. One finds the different conceptions of God, philosophies, and rituals perfectly harmonized to make the Gita a comprehensive manual for attaining perfection. The word 'yoga' has been used not only in conformity with the root *yuj* in the divadi class of Panini's grammar as *samadhau*, concentration, but also in conformity with the root *yujir* in the rudadi class as *samyoga*, to yoke. Just as the earlier yajnas were internalized to give rise to the principles of yoga, in the Gita the concepts of yoga are internalized to form a new type of yogi. The Gita

also combines the best elements of earlier severe yogic disciplines and the diligence of ritualism to mark out a middle path. This scripture revolutionized yoga.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra

Patanjali gave yoga traditions its present classical format, and yoga finally became established as one of the six orthodox philosophies of Hinduism. Over the centuries his *Yoga Sutra* was extensively commented upon by some of the greatest spiritual minds. Moreover, the terse sutras were later expanded by other sages to form separate schools, for instance, hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, *pranayama* yoga, and mantra yoga. Just as the branches of a tree are attached to a stem, similarly diverse strands of thoughts are within yoga, all connected to the original philosophy. In fact, there is a considerable theoretical overlap between schools, and in many places only a slight shift of emphasis demarcates one school from another. Even within one school there may be a variety of opinions, as teachers develop their own interpretations through personal experiences.


The appeal of yoga philosophy is its practicality and methodical approach, which can give one the highest realization. Those wishing to pursue yoga must devote their entire life to it under the guidance of a guru. The *Yoga Sutra* is the only scripture that genuinely explores the regions of the superconscious and delineates its laws of operations, which are only theoretically presented in other books. Another novelty of Patanjali's yoga is its exploration and attempt at controlling the subconscious mind, thought of as containing frightening things behind its closed doors. Patanjali shows how the latent powers of the mind can be unfurled to control the very mind that hides layers and layers of consciousness, each more subtle than the other. The world that is seen by conscious minds as

ordinary is overturned to reveal its many dimensions through yogic states of consciousness. In the final stages the yogi acquires the power of controlling Prakriti.

Patanjali describes yoga as *chitta-vritti-nirodhah*, restraining the *chitta*, mind-stuff, from taking various *vrittis*, forms. The goal of the yogi is *kaivalya*, liberation, not powers or suzerainty over certain spheres of existence. ‘Samadhi-pada’, the first chapter of the *Yoga Sutra* is for advanced aspirants; the second, called ‘Sadhana-pada’, recommends *kriya* yoga for middling aspirants; in the third chapter, titled ‘Vibhuti-pada’, *ashtanga* yoga is presented for ordinary aspirants; and in the last chapter, ‘Kaivalya-pada’, is taught the philosophy of yoga. Various *samadhis*, *siddhis*, and yogic powers are enumerated in the treatise. Some of the higher experiences recorded there are hard to achieve, but Patanjali, like a scientist, lays down rules that can be replicated by one who is diligent.

Yoga is popular not just because it is simple and adaptable, but because its spiritual dimension has been authenticated by innumerable aspirants. Somewhere down the centuries the words ‘yoga’ and ‘yogi’ became associated with secrecy and esotericism. Swamiji, himself a great yogi, says:

From the time it was discovered, more than four thousand years ago, Yoga was perfectly delineated, formulated, and preached in India. It is a striking fact that the more modern the commentator the greater the mistakes he makes, while the more ancient the writer the more rational he is. Most of the modern writers talk of all sorts of mystery. Thus Yoga fell into the hands of a few persons who made it a secret instead of letting the full blaze of daylight and reason fall upon it. They did so that they might have the powers to themselves’ (1.134).

As Sri Krishna again imparted the ancient yoga to Arjuna that was ‘lost owing to a long lapse of time’, so in this age Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples have come to revive yoga in its pristine form for the benefit of humanity. 

Notes and References

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3. *The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, Swami Madhavananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 4.
4. See *Kaushitaka Upaniṣad*, 2.5.
5. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997), 229.
6. Some of the *vidyas* are: Shandilya, Bhuma, Satyakama, Upakoshala, Madhu, and Dahara.
7. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, 6.
8. *Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 1.335.
9. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2003), 49–50.
10. See *Maitrayani Upaniṣad*, 6.17.
11. Patanjali’s system has *savi-tarka* and *nirvi-tarka samapattihs*. Swamiji translates the two words as ‘with question’ and ‘without question’.
12. Some of the Yoga Upaniṣads are: the *Shandilya Upaniṣad* of the Atharva Veda; the *Yogatattva Upaniṣad*, the *Amritanada Upaniṣad*, the *Varaha Upaniṣad*, and the *Yogakundali Upaniṣad* of the Krishna Yajur Veda; the *Dhyana-bindu Upaniṣad* of the Sama Veda; the *Hamsa Upaniṣad* and the *Mandalabrahmana Upaniṣad* of the Shukla Yajur Veda; and the *Nada-bindu Upaniṣad* of the Rig Veda.
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Sallekhanā, Euthanasia, and Suicide: Moral Distinctions

Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharyya

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY BELIEVES that the metaphysical Reality can be better realized by living it practically than by intellectual speculation. This is the reason Indian philosophy in general and Jainism in particular ascribe supreme importance to ethics. Jainism can be defined as a religion embodying a code of conduct essential for every individual. Jainism is basically an ascetic religion whose followers take certain rigorous vows and try to observe them. According to Jain ethics, there are two courses of moral disciplines or codes of conduct: *anuvratas*, lesser vows, prescribed for householders, and *mahāvratas*, greater vows, for monks.

In the Jain tradition *sallekhanā*, self-starvation, is one of the religious *vratas*, vows, prescribed for householders as well as monks. It is a vow to be adopted for seeking moksha, liberation of the soul from the body. It is a type of voluntary death for spiritual gain. This practice has given rise to many debates regarding its ethical justifications in today's world of bioethics. The objective of this article is to analyse the ethical justifications of *sallekhanā* besides showing its moral distinction from voluntary euthanasia and suicide.

Concept and Ethics of Sallekhanā

As a system of philosophy Jainism can be characterized as ethical realism, in which right conduct is an essential condition for spirituality. Ethical codes of conduct develop an attitude of self-restraint, self-discipline, and non-attachment

for a sadhaka. As penance occupies a unique place for spiritual purification, fasting, meditation, and other austerities are normal in the Jain way of life. Fasting is also important as it purifies the body and the mind and reminds the practitioner of Mahavira Jain's emphasis on renunciation and asceticism. It is not sufficient for a Jain to simply fast, but to also resist any kind of desire for food. If one continues to desire food while fasting, then fasting becomes pointless. There are several types of fasting according to the Jain philosophy. They are: *rasa parityāga*, giving up favourite foods; *vritti samikshepa*, limiting the number of items of food eaten; *alpana anaśnan* partial fasting, that is to eat less than one needs to avoid hunger; *anaśnan*, complete fasting, giving up food and water completely for a period; and *sallekhanā*, fasting unto death.

Jain ethics are intended to discipline the body and the mind in order to create the awareness of higher values of life. Jain traditions teach not only the art of living but also the art of dying. Death, in the Jain text *Dashavaikalika*, has been classified under five heads:

- (1) The wisest or '*Pañḍita-pañḍita*' death is that of a *kevali* who leaves the body after exhausting all *karmans* and, therefore, need not take any birth after death. He has attained the summum bonum of life.
- (2) The wiser or '*Pañḍita*' death is the death of a monk who dies in tranquillity. He has performed his spiritual duties to the best of his capabilities in this life but unfortunately could not attain his ultimate end and is,

therefore, leaving this body voluntarily to continue his aspirations in another body where he will have better chances to fulfil his aim. (3) The wise or '*Bāla-paṇḍita*' death is the death of a householder who could not take to monk's life but practised partial self-control while staying at home. (4) The foolish or '*Bāla*' death is the death of an uncontrolled right believer. Though he had the seed of salvation in him, his life could not be a success since he practically lost this life in enjoyment of worldly pleasures and did not practise any self-control. (5) The worst or '*Bāla-bāla*' death is the death of a wrong believer, who has no chance of salvation.¹

The *Acharanga Sutra*, a Jain text written by Acharya Acharanga, gives the following descriptions about four types of death:

1. *Bhaktapratyākhyāna*—This means total abstinence from food and drink. The monk lies on a bed of straw and waits for death even without moving his limbs.
2. *Ṇgitamarāṇa*—The monk lies on a bare piece of ground and abstains from food and drinks although he can move according to the rules of *gupti* and *samiti*.
3. *Pādopagamana*—The monk stands motionless like a tree till death comes.
4. *Sallekhanā*—This means a planned scheme of fasting and mortification; the maximum period of mortification being twelve years and the minimum six months (178).

Technically, *sallekhanā* is 'facing death (by an ascetic or a householder) voluntarily when he is nearing his end and when normal life according to religion is not possible due to old age, incurable disease, severe famine, etc.'² The intention is to purify the body and remove all material thoughts from the mind. In this stage the ascetic not only gives up food and water but also abandons all desires and dislikes in order to concentrate exclusively on the spiritual reality as death

approaches. According to some Jain scriptures, both householders and ascetics can resort to it. The main objective of *sallekhanā* is to attenuate the passions that disturb the soul's equanimity. It prepares an individual to face death more peacefully and also paves the way to improve the condition of life after death.

There are many inner implications of this type of slow death. Jainism preaches that this vow is undertaken when one is too old to be able to live a normal religious life, or feels that one has become a burden on society, or when there remains no hope that one can effectively serve religion and society. According to the Jain tradition, death is peaceful and holy only when one faces death willingly and dies in a detached manner. The absence of passions and attachment for worldly things also gives the courage to confess one's faults and the heart to forgive everyone for all offences against oneself. This makes a person fit for *sallekhanā*. It is also taught by the Acharyas that renunciation of all worldly attachments and aversions are a necessary corollary of *sallekhanā*. While practising this vow and until the soul departs from the body one should overcome all passions and abandon all worldly attachments by austerities, such as gradually abstaining from food and water and simultaneously meditating on the true nature of the Self. The Jain text *Samantabhadra* says that one performing *sallekhanā* should put aside all affections and enmity, should ask forgiveness from others, and should forgive others. One should also confess one's misdeeds, whether *kṛta*, performed, *kārita*, caused, or *anumata*, approved, to perform.³ It is also prescribed that one who takes the vow should avoid the five transgressions: (i) Desire to live, *jīvitāśamsā*; (ii) desire to die, *marāṇāśamsā*; (iii) remembrance of friends, *mitrānūrāga*; (iv) remembrance of past pleasure, *sukhānubandha*; and (v) expectation of future

prosperity, *nidāna* (141). Thus, *sallekhanā* is a well-ordered death, also called *samādhi maraṇa*, sublime death. *Sallekhanā* is considered by the Jain acharyas as an educative vow. It educates the individual for the exalted path of spirituality provided one adopts and approaches it as a *sadhaka*.

The Jain acharyas Samantabhadra, Asadhara, and Vasuvandin have given a detailed description about the ritual of *sallekhanā* and about how a wise person should face death.⁴ They state that there are two ways: death against one's will and death through one's own will. Death against one's will is the death of an ignorant person, and death through one's own will is the death of a wise person. It is suggested that *sallekhanā* can be undertaken at the time when natural death is known to be at hand. It is said that it is better to die voluntarily than to save the body in vain when it ceases to respond to medical treatment. *Sallekhanā* is also described as the death of virtuous persons who can control themselves and subdue their senses with an undisturbed mind.

According to Jains, if the mind is not pure at the last moment, the lifelong self-control, study, austerity, worship, and charity become futile, just like a king who is well versed in the art of wielding weapons faints on the battlefield. *Sallekhanā* should be adopted most willingly and voluntarily when death is near. The principle behind this special vow is that a person, while giving up the body with complete peace of mind, patience, and without any fear, not only prevents the influx of new karmas but also purges old karmas. In the first stage of the practice it is recommended to give up the intake of solid food and only later of all sorts of liquid food. Vasuvandin does not think that one necessarily has to assume the *mahāvratā* to undertake *sallekhanā*, whereas Asadhara and Samantabhadra think it obligatory and also recommend nudity for both men and women at the last moment of life.⁵

Sallekhanā has been recommended when someone is confronted with natural calamities like flood and famine, or is faced with biological issues such as senility, suffering from terminal disease, or incapability to worship due to old age. An approximate assessment of the remaining span of life is necessary in order to adjust to the nature of fasting. One should endure all hardships and abandon all dissatisfactions, sorrow, and fear. But if one falls ill or for any other reason cannot maintain the equanimity of the mind, one should give up the vow, start taking food, and resume other activities.

The philosophy underlying *sallekhanā* is that since the body is mortal, the ritual of holy death, as it is called, is to be performed. The pure Self is to be realized through voluntary death and by channelling one's energies towards the highest ideal of liberation. Thus, for Jains, this kind of death does not present a moral dilemma. This vow of *sallekhanā* is taken up by a Jain with the objective to accomplish *samādhi maraṇa*, also known as *pandita maraṇa*, the wise man's demise that is desired by a pious person.⁶ The other rationale is that one who is born will some day die. The fear of death is greatest in those who identify the soul with the body. But those who believe in the immortality of the soul and liberation from the cycle of rebirth can face the inevitable death heroically and without losing mental equilibrium. In short, according to Jainism, *sallekhanā* is nothing but a discipline intended to prepare a person for ending life in a noble way.

Distinction between Sallekhanā and Euthanasia

The term 'euthanasia' comes from the two Greek terms *eu*, 'easy' or 'well', and *thanatos*, 'death'. Originally, euthanasia implied assistance to the dying without shortening life. It is the deliberate killing of a dying person for his or her benefit. Often

people call euthanasia 'mercy killing', perhaps thinking that it is better for one who is terminally ill and is suffering prolonged unbearable pain. There are various forms of euthanasia:

- Voluntary euthanasia, in which terminally ill patients are killed with their consent
- Involuntary euthanasia, where terminally ill patients are killed without their consent although they are in the state to consent
- Non-voluntary euthanasia, terminally ill patients are killed without their consent, as they are not in the state to give consent, such as babies, mentally retarded, mentally sick, or those in a coma
- Active euthanasia, the deliberate act of putting people to death to release them from the suffering caused by some terminal disease
- Passive euthanasia, the treatment of terminally ill patients is withdrawn and they are allowed to die in due course from the disease from which they are suffering
- Indirect euthanasia, terminally ill patients are killed by administering some painless drugs that shorten their lives
- Auto euthanasia, dying persons take their own lives.

From the above discussion it can be observed that, except in auto euthanasia, which is a kind of suicide, two basic elements appear in all forms of euthanasia: one, the presence of another person to assist in death, and the other, the fact of suffering. Thus, the Jain concepts of *sallekhanā* and euthanasia are in no way similar.

Most of the religions of the world, Jainism included, have propounded an anti-death philosophy and are opposed to euthanasia. Many confuse the act of *sallekhanā* with euthanasia, especially with voluntary euthanasia. Euthanasia is the act of shortening a terminally ill patient's life painlessly and may have some medical grounds. The real distinction between *sallekhanā*

and euthanasia lies in the attitude towards death. *Sallekhanā* can be called an act of 'self-offering' and its basis is fearlessness. Death is not forcibly invited as in the case of euthanasia. Jains are unique in their belief regarding birth and death. In their search for moksha, Jains do not advocate death as a means to end suffering, but as a means to attain higher enlightenment. The decision of dying through *sallekhanā* is not taken due to any worldly troubles or sufferings, but due to a higher calling. In *sallekhanā* death is not brought about suddenly and painlessly but rather slowly, through starvation and meditation.⁷

Distinction between Sallekhanā and Suicide

Suicide in Sanskrit is *ātmāghāta* or *ātmahatyā*. Some people may confuse *sallekhanā* with suicide, but Jain acharyas have clearly explained the difference. Pujiyapada says that *rāga*, passion, which underlies suicide, is absent in *sallekhanā*. Similarly, Ashadhara defends *sallekhanā* by calling it a *vrata* for the protection of dharma. He further says that what a person does during the last moments of life is very important for self-realization. According to Hemchandra, *sallekhanā* is a sort of *uddīpana*, inspiration, as it were, for ascetic dharma.⁸

The distinction between suicide and *sallekhanā* becomes clear by examining the situations, intentions, and psychology of persons committing suicide or undertaking *sallekhanā*. The only thing common between them is physical death. Ambivalence or a desire to die, which creates mental conflict, is present when a person commits suicide. Moreover, such a person is also engulfed with physical and psychological feelings like exhaustion, frustration, anxiety, tension, depression, inadequacy, hopelessness, anger, guilt, mental disorder, and even wrong attitudes. A suicide is either a victim of mental weaknesses or external circumstances that he or she is unable to circumvent. All

or some of these factors irresistibly drive the victim to the horrible step of committing suicide. On the other hand, in *sallekhanā* none of the above psychological or sociological problems are found either in adopting this vow or in its fulfilment. The means adopted are conscious, deliberate, and religious and lead to supreme good. Death is not brought about by violent means like hanging, poisoning, stabbing, shooting, drowning, or leaping from a height. One has to fast according to regulatory principles. A person adopting this vow desires to be liberated from the bondage of karma, which has been responsible for all sufferings in this world and from the cycle of rebirths in different bodies.⁹ This is contrary to suicidal intentions, since there is no desire to violently and quickly put an end to life. There is no question of escaping from shame, frustration, fear, or the intention to harm oneself or family members. Above all, the vow can be adopted only with the guru's permission. The consequence of death by *sallekhanā* is neither painful nor sorrowful to anybody, as all kinds of ties are terminated with common consent. The occasion is treated as a religious festival in which there is only joy.

The act of suicide is conducted by isolating oneself from the world, and is done secretly. The purpose of killing oneself may be given in a suicide note, and the act is generally instantaneous. The act of suicide is opposed by religion and social laws. In the case of *sallekhanā* a person takes the vow of not eating food and drinking water. No one is forced to undertake *sallekhanā*; the decision is taken by an individual freely. During the fast if one feels that one cannot continue the process or the desire to live becomes strong, then one can break the vow. Jain scriptures never support suicide. In the *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* it is said that those who kill themselves by using weapons or by throwing themselves into fire or water are liable to be caught in the wheel of



Seven hells, as depicted in Jain cosmology;
cloth painting from a Jain temple in Gujarat (1613 CE)

samsara.¹⁰ *Ahimsā*, non-injury, which is the basic tenet in Jainism, rejects all kinds of violence towards others, including lower beings, and also towards oneself. Viewed from this perspective *sallekhanā* cannot be termed suicide, and there should not be any question regarding its legality.


Sallekhanā should not be construed as pro-suicide or a kind of voluntary euthanasia. Its aim is to conquer all passions and remove worldly attachments and aversions; it is undertaken by individual choice. It is not yielding to death but a way of meeting the challenge of death. During the practice of the vow there is no experience of excitement, fear, or pain. The person is under perfect self-control and is filled with joy till the last breath.¹¹ As previously mentioned

the basic concept of *sallekhanā* is that the subject prevents the influx of new karmas and liberates the soul from bondage. He or she is prepared to embrace death with fortitude and enthusiasm. In Indian religions penances are capable of burning old karmas, and such a vow is the highest penance. This mental state of a person who performs *sallekhanā* clearly distinguishes *sallekhanā* from suicide and euthanasia. *Sallekhanā* is said to be a spiritual way of welcoming death.

Historically, on the basis of evidence, many have been said to attain the *summum bonum* of life through the performance of *sallekhanā*. Many kings and Jain saints performed this ritual especially at Shravana Belagola, a Jain pilgrim centre in Karnataka. Among the great kings one finds Bimbisara, Chandragupta Maurya, and Bahubali attaining salvation in this fashion on the hill of Shravana Belagola.

But there is an ongoing debate about whether *sallekhanā* has any place in modern Indian society. It is significant to note that in 2002 in different states of India about sixty Jains were reported to have followed *sallekhanā*.¹² In 2006 only some five persons died after performing *sallekhanā*. It is estimated that more than two hundred people die annually across India from such fasts.¹³ The case of ninety-three years old Keila Devi Hirawat alerted the world media and fuelled the debate regarding the legality of practising *sallekhanā*. Keila Devi undertook *sallekhanā* early in September 2006. Her family did not oppose her resolve.¹⁴ Those who perform *sallekhanā* are revered by Jains, and their deaths are publicly celebrated. According to the human rights organizations, *sallekhanā* is not different from euthanasia or suicide and therefore it should not be allowed to continue. Their argument is that such practices are a fundamental breach of Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the right to life, and not death. But Jains

do not regard *sallekhanā* as a form of suicide because faith in Jainism or any religion that is part of a long tradition, custom, and ritual is protected and guaranteed by the same Constitution, which human right groups talk about. For Jains, *sallekhanā* is a rational and courageous act. Moreover, unlike suicide or euthanasia, those who choose *sallekhanā* have ample time and liberty to reconsider their position and go back to normal life.

We conclude that *sallekhanā* cannot be treated as suicide or euthanasia. Its practice exemplifies the victory of the soul over all kinds of worldly attachments. It is described as an act of fulfilment. 

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The Geometry Box

Dr Alpana Ghosh

IN AUGUST 2011 a lady visited me at home and narrated how her difficult life was transformed by Holy Mother's grace. I think this real story can benefit someone, somewhere, and for this reason I have tried to put it in an article form in the words of the raconteur. To me this touching story confirms that earnest and sincere prayer can change the course of one's life.

The Story of Many

My mother named me Shanti. I was born in a very poor tribal family in a village called Rappa, near Ranchi. My father was a peon in a small business firm. I was the eldest of four siblings and my father used to take me to school on his bicycle. Our school, the Vivekananda Middle School, was a small one; it is located near the village Tupudana and is devoted to children belonging to poor families. I was too young to understand the financial condition of my father. While going to school I would ask my father why I wasn't admitted to a big school where students go by bus, and he would reply that it is not the size of the school that matters, but that the best school for me is the one in which my character and moral strength are properly built. At that time I didn't understand those words; all I wanted was to go to a big school. Now I thank God that I was a student of that small 'big' school.

Years passed by; I grew up from childhood to girlhood. I was admitted to high school and enjoyed a full scholarship due to my good results in middle school. Everything went on fine for me. But one day my nice world was shattered when my father suddenly died after a week of

fever. My family became totally helpless, as we were dependent only on his income.

Bad or good times do not stop life for anyone, and slowly we recovered from the shock and started finding ways to run our family of five. My mother didn't want me to leave my studies. She was wise in this regard. She started earning something by way of sewing, and I continued my studies together with my younger sisters and brothers, who were also admitted in the same Vivekananda Middle School with full scholarship, granted on the basis of our poverty.

I successfully passed the school board examination. That was a great and happy day for our family, followed by good news: one of my father's friends offered me a job in his small office. I joined the office as bookkeeper and our family became relatively stable. I was eighteen years old.

I kept my school books and specially my geometry instruments box as a precious possession. I knew very well that my studies had come to an end, yet I had a distant dream of pursuing higher education; for this reason I didn't want to part with my books and my endearing geometry box—I loved geometry and mathematics.

The next year my mother started searching for a boy to arrange my marriage. I protested, but she insisted that I should marry and settle in life, that this would be the best for me. Thus, when I was only twenty years old, I was married to a boy named Anil. He was working in a private firm and earning a good salary; he had a good family background. We started our new life together in a rented house. The next year my son Ajoy was born. It became difficult for me

to manage the family and my job at the same time. Anil requested me to leave my job so that I could look after the child, so I readily left the job. The world became wonderful as I had my own happy family. But I didn't know then what was in store for me.

After about six months one night Anil returned from the office very late and totally drunk. I asked him the reason for it, but he very roughly replied that it was his business and I shouldn't interfere. I was confused and hurt; he had never shown even a tendency towards such behaviour. I couldn't sleep throughout the night, but he soon fell asleep. In the morning he was normal and I preferred not to raise the issue for the present. But the next night he again came back from the office very late in a drunken state. It became a routine. If I dared protest, he would shout at me, even beat me. We almost stopped talking to each other. I did my household chores in a constant state of restlessness, many times tearful. In a twinkle of an eye my family life became a hell. My son Ajoy was my only consolation.

A Ray of Light

What to do? Where to find a solution? Whom to tell my problems? I was only cursing my bad luck. I didn't say anything to my mother or my in-laws so that they wouldn't be disturbed. And there was no way in my sight to solve the problem. As days passed by Anil's drinking habit increased and he started becoming absent from his job. It became more and more difficult for me to run the family as he didn't get his full salary. It seemed that darkness had enveloped us. There was no respite; every night was the same story.

One day after my daily chores I was sitting by my table in a sad mood, thinking of my bad luck and how a happy family has been ruined only by a bad habit. I could do nothing but cry. By chance my geometry box was lying on the table and I ran

my eyes over the pencils, the compass, the angles, the scale; I was looking at those things and thinking of my happy student life when suddenly my eyes went to the inside lid of the box, where there was a photograph of the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, which I got from my school. I looked at the photograph for quite some time and remembered the teacher's words: 'Ma Sarada Devi is not an ordinary woman, she is the real mother of all; she looks after everyone, rich or poor alike; she answers everyone's prayer.' An almost imperceptible ray of light flashed in my soul, and I thought that the Holy Mother would surely help me. I started praying to her every morning and evening. Although there wasn't any change in Anil during the following days, I continued praying. I used to tell Ma to give me strength to fight the situation.

Our financial condition deteriorated so much that I decided to find a job. Desperately, I took my son and went straight away to my Vivekananda Middle School, ready to accept any kind of job the school would offer me, even as a sweeper—there is no harm in cleaning and dusting classrooms, and my son would be with me too, I thought. In the school I met the headmistress, who recognized me and enquired, in a gentle voice, about my life. Melted by her warm welcome I could not suppress my agony and told her my sad tale. She consoled me by saying that this was only a passing phase in my life and that probably Sri Ramakrishna wanted to give me an opportunity to serve people. Then slowly I asked her for a sweeper's job in the school. She was shocked at my request and asked why I should be looking for this type of job when I was a matriculate. She paused for a while and, as if thinking aloud, said that I could teach in the nursery classes, though unfortunately there were no vacancies at the present. She kept on thinking and then promised to find me a suitable job. While leaving the premises she asked me: 'Would you

like to attend a function that will be held in the school? Some monks will come and speak to the children. If possible you could bring your husband too. You will feel better.' It sounded as if I was going to have some solace in my depressing life at least for one day. Though I was not sure about my husband, I heartily agreed.

A day before the school function Anil was sober and I requested him to accompany me. As usual he didn't reply. But the next morning, after my prayers to Ma Sarada, I went to Anil with a cup of tea and to my utter surprise he said: 'I won't go to my office today, I'll attend your school function. I want to see the school you have always praised so highly.' My heart leaped with joy. I completed my daily chores and dressed my son. After a long time the three of us, my whole family, were going out together.

We reached the school, which was nicely decorated and with the students welcoming the guests. I was excited to show Anil the classrooms, our playground, and even the tree under which my friends and I used to sit for tiffin. He liked the school. We then met the headmistress, who was very pleased to see both of us. We took our seats almost at the back.

After some time four monks entered the school premises and the students welcomed them with a traditional tribal dance and song. Then, a senior monk addressed the students. Among many things he said that student life is the time for character-building, that no one can be considered a good student unless his or her behaviour and character are good, that good students are those who are bold to face any difficulty that comes their way. Then he quoted the famous words of Swami Vivekananda: 'Strength is life, weakness is death.' And then another: 'Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave

every other idea alone. This is the way to success.' I was enchanted by those inspiring words and carefully glanced at Anil from the corner of my eyes, who seemed very attentive.

Suddenly the monk directed his speech towards the guests—mostly students' parents who were of our age—and, quoting Swamiji every now and then, said: 'The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man, first of all, must make his own mind guilty and then alone can he see another man's guilt. "We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care of what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live, they travel far."' He then added: 'Don't forget that God has given us a life to do something for our family and society. Those who are not looking after their family are neither serving their family nor society; therefore, they are not serving God. "They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive." "We are responsible for what we are; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act." Always remember that when troubles assail you and the world has failed you, no matter what problems come along, God is there to help you.'

I felt every single word was spoken to me. Now I looked straight at Anil, but his face was expressionless and I could not understand what was going on in his mind. The function ended with a bhajan by the students.

She Seemed to Be Smiling

It was an enchanting evening for me, but I observed that Anil was somewhat disturbed. I asked him the reason, but he didn't answer. He just sat by the side of our cot absorbed in thoughts. I didn't say anything else.

The next morning I started my morning household chores as usual and saw Anil getting ready for his office. I felt good; I served him breakfast and gave him his lunch-box. After Anil went to his office and Ajoy began playing on his own, I found some free time for my prayers. Before that I wanted to open my geometry box to look at Holy Mother's photo, and found in it a folded piece of paper. It was a letter written by Anil, addressed to me: 'Dear Shanti, many thanks for taking me to your school, where I had the chance to listen to all those words that have opened my eyes. How I have tortured my family only to find fun for myself. One evening a friend of mine took me to a pub to celebrate his promotion and offered me drinks. At first I was not inclined to accept, but he said that nothing would happen for one day. So I took some drinks, and that was the greatest mistake of my life. After that every evening my friend would take me along to the same pub and I couldn't be strong enough to resist the temptation; thus, it became a habit. I

could see your agony. Every night I would promise myself that I would end the friendship with that man, but again in the evening I became weak to resist his requests. Slowly my drinking habit increased and I neglected all of you. You were patient and quiet, but I could not change myself. Yesterday some of the words I heard in your school hit me deep: "Those who are not looking after their family, are not serving God or society." During the whole night those words reverberated in my mind. I looked at Ajoy's face, so pure and innocent, whom I have neglected so much. I decided to stop my habit and look after the family. You and Ajoy are my own, I have to take care of you, only then will I get God's blessings. I promise you that I will be the same old Anil you knew when we married. Please forgive me. I know you pray to the Holy Mother every day; please ask her to bless me too. Yours Anil.'

I think I need not describe how I felt. Drenched in tears I looked at Holy Mother's photo in my geometry box, and she seemed to be smiling. From that day Anil was as caring and loving as he used to be.

After this incident I decided to help the women of my neighbourhood who have to face similar difficulties. I go to them and tell them to pray and have patience, because sincere prayers are always answered. I always tell them my own story and try to give them solace, as much as possible. Ajoy has grown up and goes to school, so I have time to visit my neighbours in distress. I narrate to them Holy Mother's life, her patience and struggle, her soothing words. We have formed a group of friends that assemble every Saturday evening to read and talk about the Holy Mother. Friends started inviting me to their homes to listen to their household problems, and even named me Madhu Vani, sweet speech, but I am just a simple tribal woman with only two stories to share: my own and Holy Mother's.




Sri Ramakrishna and Kali

Swami Tathagatananda

THE ULTIMATE REALITY IS pure Consciousness. It is non-dual, non-relational, unitary, and universal. It is prior to every form of existence. It is the datum of all experiences. It is Satchidananda—absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss. This absolute Reality, known as Brahman, is unknown and unknowable to the impure mind. Brahman, associated with maya, is the origin, the support, and the goal of the universe. This aspect of relative reality is called Saguna Brahman, immanent in the universe as the supreme Self—the dynamic God. This all-pervading God is regarded as the reservoir of all excellences, beatitude, peace, wisdom, power, and knowledge. Sri Krishna in the Bhagavadgita declares: ‘[I am] the fruit of actions, the nourisher, the Lord, witness, abode, refuge, friend, origin, end, foundation, store, and the imperishable seed.’¹

The manifest aspect of Brahman is also called the Shakti of Brahman, the Personal aspect, which is inseparable from the Impersonal. We cannot conceive of Brahman without Shakti, or of Shakti without Brahman. These two aspects are static and dynamic, extra-cosmic and cosmic, transcendental and relative, of the same Reality seen from different viewpoints. Both viewpoints are indispensable for spiritual life to make it complete. Sri Ramakrishna says:

Brahman and Shakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun’s

rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays. ... Thus one cannot think of Brahman without Shakti, or of Shakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute.

The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were. This Power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of it as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call it Kali or Shakti. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form.²

The whole universe with its animate and inanimate objects is an evolution of Shakti. Shakti guides the process of creation even as a mother guides a child. Sri Ramakrishna experienced the presence of the Divine Mother in everything. She has become everything and everything is in her. She is love, and her love is the source and sustenance of everything; everything is finally absorbed in her love. Sri Ramakrishna describes his first experience: ‘It was as if houses, temples and all other things vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was a boundless infinite conscious sea of light! However far and in whatever direction I looked, I found a continuous succession of effulgent waves coming forward, raging and storming from all sides with a great speed. Very soon they fell on me and made me sink to the unknown bottom. I panted, struggled, and fell unconscious.’³

Motherhood of God

Vedanta says that the universe of names and forms is in essence God manifested. The effect, as we know, is not different from the cause; effects are causes in different forms with separate names. The *Brahma Sutra* teaches: 'And (cause and effect are non-different) because the posterior one has (earlier) existence (in the cause).'⁴ Swami Vivekananda says:

Mother is the first manifestation of power and is considered a higher idea than father. With the name of Mother comes the idea of Shakti, Divine Energy and Omnipotence, just as the baby believes its mother to be all-powerful, able to do anything. The Divine Mother is the Kundalini ('coiled up' power) sleeping in us; without worshipping Her we can never know ourselves. ... Every manifestation of power in the universe is 'Mother'. She is life, She is intelligence, She is love. ... A bit of Mother, a drop was Krishna, another was Buddha, another was Christ. The worship of even one spark in our earthly mother leads to greatness. Worship Her if you want love and wisdom.⁵

This universe is filled with Shakti, Divine energy, which is incessantly active in every atom of matter—solid, liquid, or gas. Everything that moves and breathes is a manifestation of Shakti; this creative force is expressed in infinite ways in infinite spheres. To the physicist, Shakti is the inherent force of matter; to the psychologist, Shakti animates and enlivens living organisms; to the mystic, the divine experience of 'unity in diversity' is obtained through the grace of Shakti. The entire superstructure of science is developed upon Shakti. Matter, energy, sound, light, heat, electricity, and so on are nothing but the modifications of Shakti.

Shakti is neither male nor female nor neuter. It is inconceivable and immeasurable, the source of all that exists. The vision of that power is

possible only through the grace of Shakti. Shakti is contemplated upon as the Divine Mother, Divine Father, or the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Shakti as the Divine Mother. The mother concept comes naturally to the mind because Shakti, being beneficent, is the embodiment of unselfish love and wisdom. It is infinite power and love. Shakti is the Mother of creation, therefore some devotees find the concept of motherhood to be more appropriate in their worship of Shakti.

Sri Ramakrishna saw the Divine Mother in every woman, irrespective of her character or status; he accepted womanhood as a token of the motherhood of God. For Sri Ramakrishna, Mother was the Shakti of Brahman and not merely a counterpart of a male deity. Whether Shakti is worshipped as mother, father, or Lord, what matters in spiritual life is the attitude behind the worship. With the deepest reverence and with absolute self-surrender Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Shakti as Mother.

God is the ruler of maya. Maya has two connotations: universal and relative. In the former it is the inexplicable universal power of the Divine Mother, and the universe is her effortless creation. From the relative standpoint maya has two aspects: one is *vidyamaya*, spiritually elevating values that lead us to God; the other is *avidyamaya*, spiritually degrading values through which maya deludes us into thinking that the fleeting and shifting appearances of the world are real. The lesson maya teaches is that a person should pierce its veil in order to reach God. This piercing can be accomplished only through her grace, as she is the author of our bondage and freedom. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna taught humankind to seek her blessings for supreme peace. Swamiji says: 'The Motherhood of God is prominent in this Incarnation [of Sri Ramakrishna]. He used to dress himself as a woman—he was,

as it were, our Mother—and we must likewise look upon all women as the reflections of the Mother’ (6.335).

Some may wonder how the frail-looking Sri Ramakrishna could worship the terrible Kali. But for all her terrible appearance, Kali was Sri Ramakrishna’s infinitely compassionate Mother. Swamiji recorded his personal experience of the fearful Kali: ‘Coming to the temple [at Dakshineswar] I saw that Mother was actually pure Consciousness, was actually living and was really the fountain-head of infinite love and beauty.’⁶ Sri Krishna, who is worshipped as a beloved God, once showed Arjuna his terrible cosmic form, described in the eleventh chapter of the Gita. Good and evil plague us in the relative world, but when we are able to transcend the world, we experience God as infinite love.

Significance of Kali’s Symbolism

The central theme of Hinduism is to see the One in the many, and the unique feature of the religion is that this One can be approached through many paths. The Gita says: ‘According to the manner in which they approach me, I favour them in that very manner. O son of Pri-
tha, human beings follow my path in every way.’⁷ Whatever is its outer manifestation, every sincere religious effort is a step towards God. God with form is much easier to approach than the formless aspect; hence the Gita cautions: ‘For them who have their minds attached to the Unmanifest [Brahman] the struggle is greater; for, the Goal which is the Unmanifest is attained with great difficulty by the embodied ones’ (12.5). Therefore, worshippers accept a *pratika*, symbol, or a *pratima*, image, of the formless God. The Impersonal and the Personal aspects of the supreme Reality are not considered contradictory in Hinduism; they are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin. This affords everyone a

foothold by which he or she can climb towards the realization of the Impersonal. A devotee does not worship the symbol or image *as* God; he or she worships God *through* the symbol or image. To worship the *pratika* as God is idolatry; to worship God *through* the *pratika* is a valid form of worship and devotion. Swamiji makes the distinction clear:

If, as it may happen in some cases, the highly philosophical ideal, the supreme Brahman, is dragged down by Pratika-worship to the level of the Pratika, and the Pratika itself is taken to be the Atman of the worshipper or his Antaryamin (Inner Ruler), the worshipper gets entirely misled, as no Pratika can really be the Atman of the worshipper. But where Brahman Himself is the object of worship, the Pratika stands only as a substitute or a suggestion thereof.⁸

The external symbol is only an aid and a stimulus to the awakening of the spirit of devotion within. Properly understood, the image is the objectification of philosophy that is pressed into the service of religion.

Kali, the Divine Mother, represents the cosmic energy of the ever-changing universe that exists in time and space. She is depicted standing upon the prostrate form of Shiva, the eternal immutable Reality. Shiva is tranquil, self-absorbed, unaware, as it were, of the dance of death and destruction enacted on his breast. The combined image of Kali and Shiva expresses the concept that the entire spatio-temporal cosmic evolution is rooted in and sustained by Shiva. The world of movement, clash, catastrophe, death, and disaster is Kali; beyond this reality we find Shiva—gloriously eternal and transcendental.

Kali is represented as dark blue in colour and with three eyes. She has a smile on her face, wears a garland of severed heads around her neck, and a girdle of severed arms around her



waist. Her protruding tongue lolls out dripping blood. In her lower left hand she holds a decapitated head, in her upper left hand a sword. With her lower right hand she bestows boons on her devotees and with her upper right hand gestures fearlessness. The combination of the terrible and benevolent aspects makes us appreciate the sublimity and grandeur of the symbol. The world is not one-sided with bliss, laughter, and happiness; there is also terror, tragedy, turmoil, and death. These two facets of good and evil are part of every sentient and insentient object in the world. Such a comprehensive concept was known as early as the Vedic period. In the

Katha Upanishad we read: 'How can one know thus as to where it [the Atman] is, for which both the brahmana and the kshatriya become food, and for which death takes the place of a curry?'⁹ That which unfolds our divine nature is good; that is evil which makes our soul contract and eclipses our inner divinity. Death does not mean the destruction of life; through death new life emerges and finds fulfilment through our struggle in the right direction of spiritual living.

The symbol of Kali is one of the mystics' superb attempts to give a visual representation of the Absolute. For the worshipper, it is full of spiritual significance. The word 'Kali' is derived from the well-known word *kala*, time, which is the prime mover of the universe. The Gita says that time, the moving picture of eternity, has been perpetually instrumental in creation and destruction: 'I am the world-destroying Time, grown in stature and now engaged in anni-

hilating the creatures.'¹⁰ Therefore, because she is the only source of existence, Kali is the power behind *kala*, which devours everything.

Interpretation of Kali's Symbology

Kali's dark colour suggests that she is the matrix of all colours, and also signifies infinity. Sri Ramakrishna tells us that just as the sky or water seen at a distance appears as endowed with colour, but seen close by the sky and water appear colourless, so Kali seen from a distance or with an impure mind, appears dark; but she has no colour for advanced devotees. Kali is infinite and infinity cannot be clothed, for

this reason she is depicted as nude or as clad in space, *digambari*. Her nudity signifies her unconditioned nature. Her long hair is dishevelled, *muktakeshi*, and each hair is a jiva. Her billowing hair symbolizes unchallenged authority. Kali's restless and protruding blood-smeared tongue indicates *rajas*, activity. She wants us to undergo hardships so that through suffering we may be inspired to exert ourselves for the attainment of spiritual fulfilment. Viewed from a higher moral plane, the pains and torments of life provide us with the opportunity to develop spiritual maturity. Her white teeth pressing down on her lolling red tongue suggest the means of controlling our restless activity with the help of *sattva*, peacefulness.

Her four hands and brandished sword are spread in all the directions of the cosmos, suggesting her divine mission of safeguarding the interests of the entire process of creative evolution. The sword in her upper left hand and the decapitated head in the lower left hand signify her corrective measures meted out to erring children when they violate cosmic laws. Her two right hands proffer boons and protection to her devotees, but her terrible chastisement is always tempered with mercy. *Shabda*, sound, is not only language but also the primeval vibration that creates the cosmos. Kali's unusual garland of fifty decapitated heads or skulls symbolizes the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, from which all sound and language originate. Her skirt of severed human hands may suggest Kali's happiness with the offering of our labour, of whose fruits she is the custodian. She is also the origin of all karma, and after the dissolution of each manifest creation, Kali preserves the seeds of her children's karma in causal form.

Popular interpretations also point to the three eyes of Kali and to the inert form of Shiva, upon whose breast she dances. Shiva is

Brahman and beyond all relativity, hence he is depicted as a dead body, *shava*. The Kali image is suggestive of death and devastation, signifying that the egocentric attitude in our heart must be destroyed, for Mother will not dance in an impure heart. Kali's three eyes represent knowledge of the past, present, and future—omniscience. Her third eye is eternally riveted on Shiva's face. With exposed shining white teeth she bites her own tongue, suggesting shame and surprise at her conduct in dancing on Shiva's breast, the ground of all her powers. Kali's eternal union with Shiva suggests that the transcendent is the support and inspirer of all cosmic energy, which is conscious. No creation is possible without this union.

All these symbols, magnificent and terrifying, are not contradictory. They unmistakably point out to devotees the Mother's deep love and affection for them. They are invariably assured of her loving nature, supreme concern, and obligation to safeguard the wellbeing of her children. She operates in this relative plane of the world through *vidya*, knowledge, and *avidya*, ignorance, which may be compared to the centripetal and centrifugal forces in the world. *Vidya* and *avidya*, life and death, beauty and ugliness, good and bad, and all the pairs of opposites besetting our daily life are the manifestations of Divine Shakti. Nothing can be separated from her—she is the only source of all that exists. Therefore, a worshipper is expected to see the Divine behind all these expressions of nature. Contradictions are experienced only on the relative plane, in *maya*; beyond *maya* they have no existence.

The Divine Mother wears a dreadful form coupled with the amiable one. The sword in her upper left hand severs human bondage. Kali's flashing sword is the symbol of her undisputed supreme authority. It refers to the words in the *Katha Upanishad*: 'In fear of Him fire burns,

from fear shines the sun; from fear run Indra and air, and death the fifth.¹¹ The sword frightens the ignorant bent on creating universal chaos, but enkindles optimism, faith, and reverence in the minds of Kali's spiritually elevated children. 'The teeth and nails of the lioness, which frighten the enemies, are the guarantees of safety to her cubs. The Mother is compassionate in spite of her harsh appearance.'¹² With her two right hands she bestows gifts and boons to her devotees and protection from fear, *abhaya*, from all danger.

Kali is ever engaged in the act of creation, preservation, and destruction. Shiva, lying inert like a corpse, is the Absolute intelligence behind the plane of relativity. Therefore, the energy that is personified as Kali is not the material energy of the scientist. Divine energy is not the outcome of poetic fancy but the high spiritual experience of the mystics. It is the ground of all phenomena. The life of Sri Ramakrishna bears testimony to the truth of Divine energy and can be verified by anyone having the same competency. Swamiji also experienced the Mother aspect of the Godhead. He once said to a Western disciple: 'You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali and Mother.'¹³ Swamiji gives an interpretation of Kali worship:

The Divine Mother is also called Prakriti or Kali, represented by a female figure, standing with feet on a male figure, indicating that until Maya lifts, we can know nothing. Brahman is neuter, unknown and unknowable, but to be objectified He covers Himself with a veil of Maya, becomes the Mother of the Universe, and so brings forth creation. The prostrate figure (Shiva or God) has become Shava (dead or lifeless) by being covered by Maya. The Jnani says, 'I will uncover God by force' (Advaitism); but the dualist says, 'I will uncover God by praying to Mother, begging Her to open the door to which She alone has the key' (7.23).

The enlightened mind accepts Mother as the source of everything, both good and evil. Evil is but the limitation or diminution of good. At the highest state of spiritual life, the world appears to be the veritable abode of the Mother. The superficial mind is frightened by her terrible looks, which excite fear and awe. To the devotee, Mother has been trying, through her chastisements, to bring wayward children to herself by her grace and boons. In her image, her compassionate aspect is much more pronounced than her dreadful aspect.

Benefits of Meditating on Kali

With the expansion of deeper spiritual experiences and development of meditative powers, devotees may receive from within more profound suggestions of these symbols. After gaining spiritual insight we may begin to see the cosmic drama from a higher perspective and to ascertain the Divine Mother's ingenuity in encouraging her children to fight against chaos and unspiritual forces. Understanding a bit of her lila through her grace, a devotee attains serenity, enlightenment, peace, and faith.

The Impersonal is higher and greater than the Personal. An illumined soul coming back from samadhi sees the Mother alone in the diversity of this world. Such a person's absorbing interest in real knowledge takes away the old attraction for all types of dualities. The pairs of opposites in the relative plane cannot be annihilated; they can, however, be transcended. Mukti from ignorance demands this realization of unity. The Mother is present in our world of names and forms, not in part but undivided and complete. Here we find the ultimate oneness of God, humankind, and the universe. To the devotee, the world becomes deified. Mukti is not the denial of the world; it is the understanding and realization of unity. It is our finite angle of vision that

is responsible for the apparent separation; the pairs of opposites are not two but one integral whole. This is the nature of Shakti, which undergoes changes in name, form, and function but remains eternally unchanged.

A philosophy based on materialism regards the world as a huge, casually-governed, automatic, and lifeless machine. Materialism has degraded the human mind, turning us into aimless cynics. Excessive material power is disintegrating us, making us restless, domineering, and violent. Spiritual blindness has brought forth disharmony, chaos, and war. Spiritual orientation alone can restore the balance and give us peace and harmony. Kali's children proclaim that we do not live in a clockwork mindless universe, as secularism suggests. We live in a universe that is alive and dynamic, a universe in which thought and consciousness are paramount forces. This philosophy is spiritually inspiring and intellectually satisfying. It brings optimism, faith, and enthusiasm, which enable us to lead a life in quest of Truth.

Pain and pleasure are indispensable for the evolution of a strong character. Swamiji, a heroic child of the Mother, exhorts us to give up our childish ideas of God. God is not attained by the weak and the immature. We require a tremendous, uncompromising courage to admit the truth that our belief in a merely 'good God' is hopelessly unrealistic. The jnana yogi tries to transcend the relative by denying an egocentric life, which is the source of diversity. He or she does this by increasingly asserting the God within, the real Self. The bhakta, on the other hand, transcends everything through absolute surrender to God. In both cases the heart should be made a cremation ground where egoism and its progeny are burnt to ashes. Swamiji exclaims: 'She is the organ! She is the pain! And She is the giver of pain! Kali! Kali! Kali! ... There must

be no fear. No begging, but demanding—*demanding* the Highest! The true devotees of the Mother are as hard as adamant and as fearless as lions. They are not the least upset if the whole universe suddenly crumbles into dust at their feet! *Make Her* listen to you. None of that *cringing* to Mother! Remember! She is all-powerful; She can make heroes even out of *stones*.'¹⁴

One of Swamiji's best known poems 'Kali the Mother' was written in a state of ecstasy during his vision of Kali in Kashmir. Swamiji devoted himself to the cause of the Mother and exhorted us to cultivate a heroic temperament in order to gain Mother's grace. The Mother grants us the best only when she is satisfied with our total dedication. Swamiji says: 'How few have dared to worship Death, or Kali! Let us worship Death! Let us embrace the Terrible, because it is terrible, not asking that it be toned down. Let us take misery for misery's own sake!'¹⁵



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Shankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism: Model of Social Inclusion

Dr Jashobanta Roy

THE TERMS 'social exclusion' and 'social inclusion', which are related to a welfare state, has gained considerable currency over the last few decades. These concepts have become important because of their significance in the social development of many countries, including India. The terms originally figured in the policy discourse during the 1970s in France and were later adopted by the European Union in the late 1980s. In many instances it replaced the old concepts of poverty.

Social Exclusion in India

Social exclusion is a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in society. It refers to the process by which individuals or an entire community are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities, and resources normally available to all members of society. Social exclusion has to be understood as an institutionalized form of inequality. It is the failure of society in extending economic resources and social recognition to all sections of its population. The excluded people are deliberately kept away from many aspects of social life. Social inclusion, on the other hand, can be defined as a method to systematically combat exclusion through economic planning and legal processes. It results in the elimination of social and economic inequalities and makes for social absorption. From a broader viewpoint, even stronger or richer nations practise exclusion of weaker

nations. This is the reason why the United Nations Charter declares: 'To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.'¹

Social exclusion in India is not a recent phenomenon. However, the exclusion discourse in India needs to be understood against the backdrop of India's multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic background. Caste, religion, ethnicity, and gender also play a dominant role in determining the glorious architecture of Indian life. But when the process of exclusion continues for a long time in a wrong direction, a sense of alienation develops among socially disadvantaged groups, ultimately disturbing social harmony and integration. There is a need to combat such situations by adopting an inclusive socioeconomic policy to eliminate inequalities and poverty. Developmental policies should be so framed that disadvantaged groups be given equal rights and opportunities for development. Policy makers should understand that economic development is not meant for only a few selective groups, rather development has to be holistic. Policies must focus on proper and thorough implementation of plans and programmes for inclusive development. In doing so, the energies of the excluded people can enhance all-round social development.

A social reform movement, based on the liberal doctrines of bhakti, swept across India between the twelfth and fifteenth century CE. The movement initiated new social ideas, besides giving rise to bhakti sects. It was a reaction to societal degradation and cultural distortion that plagued many parts of the country. Like the rest of India, social, religious, and political life in Assam was in a shambles. Confusion and doubts prevailed among various religious doctrines fighting for space. Caste and priestly oligarchy had become a source of social friction and a means of exploitation. Politically the land was divided into several kingdoms that indulged in a constant struggle for supremacy. This political instability contributed to economic, educational, and religious chaos. There was an urgent need to reorganize society along democratic lines to restore order and peace. At such a crucial period Shankardeva emerged with his liberalizing view of Vaishnava doctrines and a philosophy of social inclusion that gave a new dimension to Assamese society.

The Bhakti Movement in Assam

Srimanta Shankardeva (1449–1568) was a saint, scholar, playwright, and religious reformer. He is credited with the unification of Assam by bringing together the two major kingdoms of Ahom and Koch. He created a religious movement with a set of new values that achieved social synthesis. His movement was part of the larger bhakti movement sweeping all over India. Shankardeva inspired the bhakti movement in Assam just as Ramananda, Guru Nanak, and Kabir did in the North, Basava in the South, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal and Orissa, and a galaxy of saints like Namdev and Tukaram in Maharashtra. Shankardeva's contributions are living traditions in Assam. The doctrines he preached are followed by a large population today, and

the monasteries he and his followers established continue to flourish and sustain his legacy.

Shankardeva was keenly aware of the social conditions of his age and pondered over the problem of liberating people from the sufferings inflicted on them. But he also knew well that in an age when feudalism was gradually gaining ground, it was an uphill task to remove the barriers that divided people. Shankardeva, therefore, evolved a new teaching that would not only be simpler in form but also easily understood and followed by all people, irrespective of caste, social status, and education. Thus, he founded the creed of Neo-Vaishnavism, which sought to create an egalitarian society based on shared values of fraternity, equity, humanism, and democracy. The new creed he started is known as *eka-sharana-nama-dharma*, surrender and devotion to a single God—Sri Krishna or Vishnu—by uttering his various names. He considered the *shravana*, hearing, and kirtan modes of bhakti as prescribed by the Bhagavata to be a sufficient religious endeavour. These modes were accessible to all men and women irrespective of birth and status, with no rigid theocratic laws to be followed by the votaries. Though the central theme of Shankardeva's doctrine is strict monotheism, with the chanting and remembering of God's name as the principal form of worship, he was tolerant towards other faiths as well.

He taught that the service of humanity is the service of God. He instructed his followers not to hate anybody however lowly. In the *Bhakti-Pradipa* he says to his disciples: 'Never hurt other peoples' religion / Be merciful to all beings / Be compassionate to all sects.'² Again, in *Bhakti-Ratnakara* he says: 'Censure not the followers of other religions.'³ From these statements follow the essence of Neo-Vaishnavism's tolerant attitude to all faiths and sects.

Shankardeva wished for a future where all men would be equal and where there would be no repression of one person by another. He, however, realized that the translation of his vision into reality would necessitate a radical change in the whole sociocultural, political, and economic infrastructure. This was a massive task in the age of the rising and restless social classes. He took a pragmatic approach of not violently trying to transform the whole society into a paradise of peace. Hence, he established within the confines of the existing society safe havens where the conditions of peace and equality could be fulfilled. This he did by laying the foundation of two unique institutions: Sattrā, monastery, and Namghar, name-house. Sattrā was the materialization and fulfilment of Shankardeva's quest for tribal oneness and equality. It started on a missionary note by working towards the uplift of backward classes and by minimizing the rigidity of caste distinctions. Peripheral social groups, including the so-called untouchables, backward classes, and tribes, were taken into the new fraternity. Some of his disciples were Gobindo, a Garo; Paramananda, a Miri; Narahari, an Ahom; Narottam, a Naga; Jayarama, a Bhutia; the Muslim Chansai; and Bhattadeva, a brahmana scholar. They all took part in religious activities and when required acted as guides to analyse the essence of *eka-sharana-nama-dharma*. In his popular work *Kirtana-ghosha*, Shankardeva writes: 'Bhakti is no respecter of caste.'⁴ Swami Vivekananda, while speaking of his tour of Assam and East Bengal, says that 'he had come across the worship of one "Hanker Deo" [*sic*] who was regarded as an Incarnation and whose followers were Vaishnavas. This ancient sect had a very wide following in those parts.'⁵

Thus, people from all castes and walks of life were received by Shankardeva as disciples,

who later would act as teachers of the sect. A democratic outlook permeates the teachings and practices of the Neo-Vaishnava faith in Assam. On one side, God is brought down from the metaphysical heights to the reach of ordinary people; on the other side, all human beings are elevated to divinity through the teachings that emphasize the identity of God and the human soul. Shankardeva's concerns were not limited to human rights alone but they extended even to include animal and plant rights, as is evident from some of his literary works. In *Kirtana-ghosha* one finds reference to all living beings as parts of the one God: 'Thou art animals and birds, gods and demons, trees and grass, it is due to nescience that the bewildered seeth multiple phenomena' (41).

Another institution through which the unifying spirit of Shankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism finds expression is the village Namghar. It is an offshoot of the parent institution of Sattrā. The Namghar is the venue for *nam-prasangas*, congregational chanting of prayers. It provides a common forum for villagers to assemble in an atmosphere of goodwill and cooperation. The village Namghar functions as an effective institution at grass-roots level, while playing a diverse role in social, cultural, and political areas. When feudalism was deeply entrenched in medieval times, Shankardeva amazingly conceived the idea of community development and the *panchayat raj*, rule by five. Through this institution he united village communities to settle their disputes in accordance with their local judicial procedures and methods. The Namghar enables people of a village to cooperate in different areas on equal terms. It stands as an institution of effective popular participation at local level in such contexts as self-help and community development. It mobilizes and distributes development benefits by actively and meaningfully

involving the masses in decisions that determine societal goods and allocation of resources.

In today's world of technology the individual is self-centred, egoistic, and clamouring for power, wealth, and social status. The majority of individuals have stopped thinking of the community in which they have been nurtured. In such an atmosphere relationships have lost their intrinsic worth. The world is organized instrumentally for the satisfaction of some undefined, intangible need of personal security and fulfilment. Social character has changed so much that many modernists emphasize that individuals need not even bother about the 'unity of life'. But it is precisely the unity of life and its overall inclusive end that provides a teleological framework for one's endeavours. The fragmented life of such individuals is beset with the fear of being left out of the race—a fear whose origin and character they are ignorant of. Today's citizens are lost in the wilderness of their own civilization! Modern technology has facilitated the rise of the modern state, with its complex and centralized administration. With the centralization of power, politics without ethics has taken control. The hankering for power has increasingly destroyed the creative energies of society. What is required is a new social order marked by a radical decentralization of power. This means building a new model from the base rather than ordering it politically from the top, granting thus a total inclusion of all sectors.

The Need for Social Inclusion

Bhakti movements were a tremendous force all over India. They changed the religious and social life of the country. But almost none built lasting institutions that would carry forward their social ideas after a couple of centuries. Of course, huge temples and monasteries became

centres of devotion, but institutions working for social uplift and interaction were non-existent, except in the work of Srimanta Shankardeva. Shankardeva wanted to create a democratic social order in which all people would be equal and there would be no repression of any kind. Therefore, in the present Indian scenario the concept of a Namghar can provide a platform for spreading the message of peace, harmony, and integration—the basic tenets of Neo-Vaishnavism. It can pave the way for coherence in society by bringing all castes, creeds, and communities together. Namghar as an institution of civil society can also act as a platform for a state-civil partnership of decentralizing power that helps in the creation of an egalitarian society.⁶ The institutions of Sattrā and Namghar are capable of generating a sense of universal brotherhood in society.

As the social inclusion discourse is becoming a key to address pressing social issues like poverty, education, employment, and identity, we can learn to adapt India's present-day requirements to Shankardeva's model of social inclusion for human development.



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Mother of Mayavati: The Story of Charlotte Sevier – II

Dr Amrita M Salm

THERE ARE numerous descriptions of the atmosphere that Vivekananda created by his presence. A journalist wrote in a British publication of India: ‘Tall, broad, with fine features enhanced by his picturesque Eastern dress, his personality is very striking. ... His gifts as an orator are high. He can speak for an hour and a half without a note or the slightest pause for a word.’¹

Vivekananda’s Impact

Swami Vivekananda was a young monk, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836–86), who had come to the US to participate in the Parliament of Religions, part of the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago. Although this was his apparent reason for coming to the US, along with his desire to raise funds for helping his countrymen, he had a world mission: “‘To create a new order of humanity” in the West’ (3.4). Burke interprets this order as ‘a large number of individuals who would work in the world in every capacity and whose action would spring from deep and awakened levels of consciousness bringing about a highly advanced spiritual nature’ (ibid.). Vivekananda’s speeches on Hinduism and other subjects, during and after the Parliament, endeared him to scholars and educated people. He lectured throughout most of the eastern and mid-western regions of the US, staying for over four years during his first visit. While in the US he was writing to his brother monks, friends, admirers, and disciples, inspiring them to organize their efforts to serve

God in the poor. A new wave of spirituality was engulfing the world and Vivekananda was one of the major players in this movement.

The swami’s extraordinary grasp of Eastern and Western philosophy, history, and culture, his depth of knowledge of the soul based on his own personal realizations, along with his ability to articulate these ideas, is frequently found in the reminiscences of people like Madame Calve, one of the greatest opera singers of her time. She wrote about her first meeting with Vivekananda: ‘It has been my good fortune and my joy to know a man who truly “walked with God”, a noble being, a saint, a philosopher, and a true friend. His influence upon my spiritual life was profound. He opened up new horizons before me; enlarging and vivifying my religious ideas and ideals; teaching me a broader understanding of truth. My soul will bear him eternal gratitude.’²

Compared to his experience in the US, when Vivekananda came to London in 1895, he had considerable and very favourable press coverage of his lectures. When he arrived for his second visit, a year later, the swami was thirty-three years old and commanded the attention of those who met him. His eloquence, his striking eyes and Eastern appearance, his depth of understanding, all resulted in a group of people who were attracted to the philosophy he was expounding.

Vivekananda’s impact on the British people was frequently expressed. One of the leaders of the Anglican Church in the late 1800s, Reverend H R Haweis, wrote about Vivekananda: ‘This

remarkable person appeared in England in the autumn of 1895, and although he led a very retired life, [he] attracted numbers of people to his lodgings, and created everywhere a very deep impression. He seemed completely indifferent to money, and lived only for thought. He took quite simply anything that was given to him, and when nothing came he went without, yet he never seemed to lack anything.’³

Eric Hammonds, who attended Vivekananda’s talks in London, vividly described him: ‘His dark skin, his deep glowing eyes, even his costume, attracted and fascinated. Above all, eloquence acclaimed him, the eloquence of inspiration. ... Swamiji soon showed that he was equally versed in history and political economy. ... His words, rapier-like, pierced the armour of scholastic convention; yet no bitterness spoilt his speech. This Hindu, cultured, gracious with his notable smile that disarmed unkindly criticism, held his own and made his mark’ (4.159).

The Sevier’s experience seems quite similar to that of others who were attracted to the swami and his philosophy. Christine Greenstidel, later known as Sister Christine, was a disciple of Vivekananda who first saw him in Detroit in 1894 when he was lecturing there.⁴ She wrote about this meeting: ‘It happened. The stupendous thing for which we had been waiting—that which dispels the deadly monotony, which turns the whole of life into a new channel, which eventually takes one to a far-away country, which sets one among strange people, to whom, from the very first, we feel a strange kinship; wonderful people who know what they are waiting for, who know the purpose of life.’⁵



Mother Sevier in Mayavati, 22 August 1914

Vivekananda’s younger brother Mahendranath Dutta lived with him in London in 1896 and attended his classes and lectures. He provides a vibrant description of the swami’s behaviour. Before arriving at the lecture venue the swami would joke and laugh with his housemates. When he began to lecture, his appearance, gestures, and voice changed and were charged with authority. He became the teacher pouring out a spiritual radiance and power that lifted the thought current of the listeners.

Mahendranath Dutta writes about the state of Vivekananda’s mind as he perceived it. Fortunately, these reminiscences have been translated from Bengali into English by Swami Yogeshananda. They provide a visual picture of Vivekananda’s second visit to London in 1896



Mother Sevier with Swami Virajananda (centre) in Mayavati

during the time that the Seviers were first associated with their teacher. He wrote that one day the swami said to several of the men staying at the flat there: 'You see at night I go to my room and lie down. I keep quiet for a while, and then within me so much *ananda* [bliss] arises that I cannot stay lying down. I see the Blissful Mother. Men, animals, the sky and earth—all are saturated with bliss. I cannot lie down any longer; so I get up and dance in the middle of the room. That bliss can no longer be confined within my heart. The whole world becomes filled with it, as it were.'⁶ While saying this he began to dance around like a child and said with affection to those present: 'Be happy; don't be depressed; everything will be filled—the Bliss Mother [Divine Mother] is everywhere—all will be filled with bliss' (ibid.).

Additionally, Mahendranath Dutta gives a detailed description of how Vivekananda's body, mind, and spirit soared during his public talks:

Swamiji, taking up a subject, would begin in a soft manner. Gradually his mood would change and (voice) become louder. The sweet tones of his beginning, with the gracious expression and affectionate eyes little by little would begin to change. Then his body would become straight as a rod. His hips, spine, neck and head all seemed as if suspended from a common string. Slowly his meditative mood would deepen, his tone of voice become altogether altered. His rhythmical sonorous voice would come from his throat in an unobstructed stream. People nearby and those farther away also, could hear that sound. In that voice of his there was no note of harshness, nor of sweetness, nor of sorrow, nor of 'I and you'. It was as if in boundless space a vibration had arisen, been converted into waves and that sound was gradually penetrating everyone's ear and body—to


the very marrow of the bones. Yet everyone at such times had this particular feeling that they had no body. Body-consciousness was totally removed. Place was absent: even the consciousness that one was sitting somewhere was gone. Time was nothing, and there was no awareness of one speaking and others listening. Speaker and audience were totally one. Neither had a gross body. All had risen to the causal body and from the vast firmament, the sound was becoming a single wave-current vibration. Then he would often say, 'I am a voice without form'.

His power to make others feel like this was like a communicable disease. That is why all the topics and arguments of his lectures could not be remembered or taken notice of; it was the living power that was the reality: the arguments, the language, were unreal. ... He would say, 'I am directly seeing and feeling the Truth; I am perceiving Truth and I am myself the Truth' (ibid.).

There were many people who had close relationships with Vivekananda and received regular correspondence from him. The Hale family,

of Chicago, associated with the swami from the time he was their guest in 1893 till the end of his life. He considered them to be his adopted family and looked upon the daughters as his sisters. They received many letters from him filled with his loving and brotherly advice, expressing his plans or just teasing them. On 7 July 1896 Vivekananda wrote the Hale sisters referring to the Seviers as 'some English friends who are going to live in my monastery there [India].'⁷ Later, in letters written to Alasinga Perumal, Lala Badri Sah, and others, the swami refers to the Seviers as his disciples. Shortly before returning to India, in 1896, Vivekananda wrote to his friend Lala Badri Sah:

I have three English friends with me. Two of them, Mr and Mrs Sevier, are going to settle in Almora. They are my disciples, you know, and they are going to build the Math for me in the Himalayas. It was for that reason I asked you to look for some suitable site. We want a whole hill, with a view of the snow-range, all to ourselves. It would of course take time to fix on the site and complete the building. In the meanwhile will you kindly engage a small bungalow for my friends? ... My friends will live in this bungalow in Almora and then go about looking for a site and building (6.383).

In this letter the swami refers to the Seviers as both his disciples and his friends. No doubt they were both. They loved and respected him. Charlotte had searched for years and had now found a philosophy that appealed to her nature and tendencies. She had found a teacher who respected her mind and heart, called her 'mother', and believed that she could manifest her divinity through sincere effort and regular practice. He offered her the opportunity to move to India and help spread the message of Vedanta. Her passion had been kindled, the fire had been lit, and soon she would become 'mother Sevier'. 

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Mother Sevier in England with her two nieces and a hired nurse, about 1928



Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels

Somenath Mukherjee

(Continued from the previous issue)

La Champagne

THIS SHIP BELONGED to the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, more popularly known as the French Line, of which we already have spoken about while dealing with *La Touraine*. The SS *Champagne*, or *La Champagne*, had a gross tonnage of 6,726—according to another report, 7,087 grt—and a dead weight of 2,884 tons, with a length and width of 150.3 meters (493.1 feet) and 15.76 meters (51.7 feet) respectively. The steamer had two funnels, four masts, and a single propeller with a nominal speed of 17.5 knots. Its engine of 9,000 horse power had an inverted, triple expansion six superposed cylinders. *La Champagne* was the first of a series of four steamers of the French Line—the others were *La Bourgogne*, *La Gascogne*, and *La Bretagne*. *La Champagne* had a capacity to accommodate 1,055 passengers—390 in the first class, 65 in the second, and 600 in the third. The ship was built by Chantiers et Ateliers de Penhoet, Saint-Nazaire, France, and was launched on 15 May 1885.⁸⁵

La Champagne's maiden voyage was on 22 May 1886 from Le Havre to New York, almost fourteen years before Swami Vivekananda would see her. Within a year of her launch, she made a transatlantic trip in record time. A heading in the *New York Times* of 24 July 1887 reads: 'LA CHAMPAGNE'S SPEED. THE TRIP FROM HAVRE 7 DAYS 14 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.' The news, smeared with nostalgic navigational procedures, says:

The operator at the Ship News office had a shock yesterday afternoon when the machine ticked off 'La Champagne, Fire Island, 3:48.' And as sundry old salts looked at the strip of white paper on which the record was made they innocently wanted to know what La Champagne it was, and were as much surprised, as old salts ever are, to learn that it was the French steam ship from Havre. Never before had a vessel of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique been spoken off Fire Island at that time on Saturday, and it was clear that the record from Havre was broken.

To highlight the feat, the paper mentioned an accident that occurred to *La Champagne* in the recent past: 'It was her first trip since she started on May 7 and was beached by Capt. Traub after an unavoidable collision. The steamer since then up to July 16 has been at St Nazaire, where all the work of the French line is done, and the result of her visit there was evidently no diminution of speed. La Champagne was the fastest steamer of the line before, having a record of 7 days and 17 hours, made a year ago.'⁸⁶

In 1896 some changes were made to *La Champagne*, which included a new boiler and a quadruple expansion machine. The funnels were raised and two masts were removed. A few more mishaps happened to *La Champagne* on different occasions, entailing various kinds of damages and repairs that caused the temporary suspension of her usual voyages. For example, the *New York Times* of 1 March 1898 reports:



La Champagne

A disaster to a great ocean liner, even if entails only a detention such as has befallen *La Champagne*, inevitably arrests public attention. There is so much left of ‘the mystery of the sea’ in spite of all that steam has done to dispel it that the mere announcement that a ship is overdue opens a boundless field of conjecture. People whose friends have sailed for Europe watch with eagerness the cable reports, and experience a sensible relief when the arrival of the ship is reported from the other side, who would not be disturbed if they did not hear for weeks from the same people if they had gone as long a journey overland.

The uneasiness, easily growing into alarm, that is felt when an ocean steamer is even three days overdue is in fact a tribute to the perfection of the transatlantic service.⁸⁷

This, in a way, indicates that Swami Vivekananda’s seafaring journeys were always subjected to the uncertainties of the times.

On 21 January 1905 *La Champagne* made her last Le Havre-New York voyage before being transferred to the Mexican route. In March and April 1906 she again did two transatlantic rounds and continued her Mexican route. In 1913 she was engaged in the St Nazaire-Panama route, probably by the Compagnie de Navigation Sud-Atlantique. On 28 May 1915, a stormy summer day, *La Champagne* ran aground at the entrance to St Nazaire harbour and broke into two. Thus, the once majestic steamship reached her end and was eventually sold for scrapping.⁸⁸

The Journey

Regarding the swami’s journey aboard *La Champagne* we have only his letter to Christine Greenstidel of 3 August 1900. At 9 a.m. on that Friday morning he wrote: ‘It is foggy this morning. We are in the channel—expect to reach [Le Havre] at 12 a.m. [noon]. It has been a very bad



Le Havre, c.1900–10

voyage—rolling and raining and dark nearly all the time. Terrible rolling all through. Only last night I had good sleep. On other occasions the rolling makes me sleep well, but this time I don't know what was the matter; the mind was so whirling. Anyway, I am well and soon to reach land. Hope to reach Paris this evening.'⁸⁹

The next piece of information available is a telegram Swamiji sent to Mrs Francis Leggett immediately on arriving at the Saint Lazare Railway Station on 3 August 1900: 'ARRIVE A HUIT HRES STLAZARE—VIVEKANANDA' (ibid.). [I arrive at eight o'clock (p.m.) St Lazare—Vivekananda]. According to his biography, he 'arrived at Le Havre at noon on the third of August. He travelled the same day by rail to Paris'.⁹⁰ The Paris-Le Havre railway, fully functional since 1847, was a stretch of 228 kilometres.

The Interlude

Swami Vidyatmananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, has researched Swamiji's visits in Europe. He writes: 'I identified the Parisian residence (6 Place des Etats Unis) where Swamiji stayed for some weeks as the guest of Mr and Mrs Francis Leggett when he visited the Exposition Universelle Internationale in 1900.'⁹¹ Apart from

this and a few more places, Vivekananda also vacationed on the Brittany coast as a guest of Mrs Sara Bull.

Describing the house and the occasion, Frank Leggett's daughter later wrote: 'The house in the Place des Etats Unis turned out to be all that was expected of it, elegant in the extreme and conveniently placed for the Exhibition. ... As far as one can see everyone came that year to Paris.

Nivedita and Sara Bull arrived later, and the Swami.'⁹² It is learnt that Swamiji, accompanied by Francis and Alberta, 'went every morning' to the exhibition; and it was Prof. Patrick Geddes, a close acquaintance and an eminent sociologist of international repute during his days and beyond, 'who explained to them the various exhibits' (ibid.).

Swamiji gave a speech at the Congress of the History of Religions, though he did not attach much importance to it, as we read in his letter to Swami Turiyananda of August 1900: 'The session of the Congress of History of Religions is over. It was not a big affair; some twenty scholars chattered a lot on the origin of the Shalagrama and the origin of Jehovah, and similar topics. I also said something on the occasion.'⁹³ The same letter betrayed his physical condition at that time: 'My body and mind are broken down; I need rest badly. ... Dealing with people entails constant mental uneasiness' (ibid.).

After staying for nearly three months in Paris Swamiji's second visit to the West came to its end. He boarded the legendary transcontinental *Orient Express*, leaving Paris on 24 October 1900 and journeying across southwest Europe to Constantinople.

Three things become evident while reading many of the letters the swami wrote during this time: his tendency to disassociate himself from the leadership of the Ramakrishna Order, his frail health, and his high spiritual state during those days. Regarding the first point, he wrote to Christine on 14 October 1900:

I am sending all the money I earned in America to India. Now I am free, the begging-monk as before. I have also resigned from the Presidentship of the Monastery. ... I am so nervous and so weak. 'As the birds which have slept in the branches of a tree wake up, singing when the dawn comes, and soar up into the deep blue sky, so is the end of my life.' ... I have attained my aim. I have found the pearl for which I dived into the ocean of life. I have been rewarded. I am pleased (8.538).

But the same letter hints that he had a plan of returning to Paris after visiting places like Constantinople and others: 'We shall go to Constantinople, the Near East, Greece, and Egypt. On our way back, we shall visit Venice. It may be that I shall give a few lectures in Paris after my return' (8.537). He assured the same to Mrs Bull in his letter of 22 October 1900, merely a couple of days before he boarded the *Orient Express*: 'I think you will be in America by the time we return; if not, I will see you in London again' (9.150)—Swamiji was accompanied by Josephine Macleod, Emma Calvé, and others. But his utter disregard for physical limitations notwithstanding, destiny had other plans for him. His sudden change of plans took him back to his own country,

to pass the fast receding mortal days among his own people. The incident depicting this abrupt change in his mood can be pieced together by following the reminiscences of Miss Macleod. One day, while all were in Egypt, Swamiji went to Josephine and said: "I must leave immediately. I must go back to India!" And she [Josephine], though minding, had answered with a full heart, "Go!" And next day he left for Port Said and a week later sailed for home.⁹⁴

En route to Constantinople, where they all stayed for ten days, the party had a three-day halt at Vienna.⁹⁵ They saw places of interest in both the countries. Next came Greece; there the group stayed for around four days before moving to Egypt by the *Czar*, a Russian steamer. Not much information is available about the *Czar*, except that it was built in 1883 by the Armstrong, Mitchell, & Co. of Newcastle; her port was Odessa, and the owner was the Russian Steam Navigation & Trading Co., which was established in 1856 and functioned till it was nationalized in 1918, following the Russian revolution.

As discussed above, in Egypt things took a sudden turn for Swamiji. Emma Calvé writes in her autobiography: 'With the swami and some

Route of the Orient Express



of his friends and followers, I went upon a most remarkable trip, through Turkey, Egypt and Greece. ... What a pilgrimage it was! Science, philosophy and history had no secrets from the Swami. I listened with all my ears to the wise and learned discourse that went around me.’⁹⁶ She adds: ‘This marvellous journey proved to be almost the last occasion on which I was to see the Swami. Shortly afterward he announced that he was to return to his own country. He felt that his end was approaching, and he wished to go back to the community of which he was director and where he had spent his youth’ (191–2).

Before continuing with the swami’s route a remarkable incident is worth mentioning here: ‘After a three-months’ stay in France, Swamiji left Europe forever by way of Munich, Constantinople, Athens, and Cairo. I was able to trace this voyage in detail and identify the auditorium near Constantinople where he gave a clandestine talk on the Vedanta in a Christian missionary college—clandestine because of the opposition of the ruling Turks.’⁹⁷

Swamiji left Cairo for Port Tawfiq, a place close to Suez at the south end of the Suez Canal. On 26 November 1900 he wrote from Port Tawfiq to Miss Macleod intimating to her his imminent voyage and the preceding predicament:

The steamer was late; so I am waiting. Thank goodness, it entered the Canal this morning at Port Said. That means it will arrive sometime in the evening if everything goes right.

Of course it is like solitary imprisonment these two days, and I am holding my soul in patience.

But they say the change is thrice dear. Mr Gaze’s agent gave me all wrong directions. In the first place, there was nobody here to tell me a thing, not to speak of receiving me. Secondly, I was not told that I had to change my Gaze’s ticket for a steamer one at the agent’s office, and that was at Suez, not here. It was good one way,

therefore, that the steamer was late; so I went to see the agent of the steamer and he told me to exchange Gaze’s pass for a regular ticket.

I hope to board the steamer some time tonight. I am well and happy and am enjoying the fun immensely.⁹⁸

That night Swami Vivekananda boarded, on his last sea voyage, the Bombay bound SS *Rubattino*, an Italian line ship that came from Naples.

(To be concluded)

Notes and References

85. See <http://www.frenchlines.com/ship_en_250.php> accessed 8 May 2012.
86. <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9A02EFD6C1430E633A25757C2A9619C94669FD7CF>> accessed 4 May 2012.
87. <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9505E1D61039E433A25752CoA9659C94699ED7CF>> accessed 4 May 2012.
88. See <http://www.frenchlines.com/ship_en_250.php> accessed 8 May 2012.
89. *Complete Works*, 9.146.
90. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.537.
91. Swami Vidyatmananda, *The Making of a Devotee* (E-Book) (Gretz: Centre Védantique Ramakrishna), Chapter 6, section 4; available at <<http://www.vivekananda.net/PDFBooks/MakingOfDevotee.pdf>>.
92. *Late and Soon: the Transatlantic Story of a Marriage*, Frances Leggett (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 127.
93. *Complete Works*, 8.532.
94. *Late and Soon: the Transatlantic Story of a Marriage*, 134.
95. There is a discrepancy in this regard, as Burke writes: ‘According to Miss Macleod, they stayed in Vienna for two days; according to Swamiji, for three days’—*Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6.385.
96. Emma Calvé, *My Life*, trans. Rosamond Gilder (New York, London: D Appleton, 1922), 188–9; available at <<http://www.archive.org/details/mylife021591mbp>>.
97. *The Making of a Devotee*, Chapter 6, section 4.
98. *Complete Works*, 8.539.



Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

NOW LET US LOOK AT the opinion of the third group. It is admitted that the function of words is accomplished when their meaning is understood. Even so, after studying the Vedas and its auxiliaries³⁶ and after cogitating upon the meaning of the Vedas thus studied, it is incontrovertible that the Vedas prescribe actions. Also, the Upanishadic texts contained in the Vedas speak about the Atman without any special difference from the manner in which the Vedas speak about actions. That is, both texts prescribing actions and texts speaking of the Atman are found in the Vedas, and we understand that we are entitled to perform actions; it is thus established that there is conjunction of knowledge and work or *jñāna-karma samuccaya*. Further, the *Isha Upanishad*

prescribes lifelong performance of actions through statements such as, 'By performing actions, indeed, should one wish to live here for a hundred years.'³⁷ It denounces ignorance and presents knowledge through statements such as, 'Those worlds of devils are covered by blinding darkness' (3). The Upanishad says that actions or knowledge cannot individually be the means of liberation: 'Those who worship *avidyā*, rites, enter into blinding darkness; but into greater darkness than that enter they who are engaged in *vidyā*, meditation' (9). It further states that the conjunction of actions and knowledge is a means of attaining immortality: 'He who knows these two, *vidyā* and *avidyā*, together, attains immortality through *vidyā*, by crossing over death through *avidyā*' (11). This is also supported by

Smṛiti texts such as, 'Just as birds fly in the sky with both the wings, through both actions and knowledge the immortality is attained.'³⁸ This is the opinion of the third group.

These three schools of thought are now refuted. Actions cannot be the means of liberation; knowledge is the means. However, actions can purify the *citta*, mind-stuff, and make one fit to attain knowledge; so actions can be accepted as an auxiliary to the attainment of knowledge.

The relation of a word to its meaning is called *śakti*, the denotative function. The denotative function of a word is not always related to action. When someone is told 'a son is born to you', he becomes happy; when he hears 'you have lost your wealth', he becomes sad. Such happiness and sorrow can be inferred by the signs of the face becoming cheerful or morose. Even a child can understand that these words cause the change of mood. However, the true import of these words can be understood only by knowing their meaning and the relation of the words, *sambandha*, with something. According to the changes in circumstances, one has to insert, *āvāpa*, or remove, *udvāpa*, some words and arrive at the intended meaning. In this case the denotative function is not related to action but to the knowledge of the birth of a son or the loss of wealth leading to change in moods. Though in the beginning one considers the denotative function of the word 'jar' to be connected to some actions, later, for the sake of simplicity, *lāghavam*, the denotative function of the word 'jar' is limited to being connected to a jar alone and not to any action. Because of its being cumbersome and also lacking support in evidence, the denotative function cannot be considered to be related to actions alone.

A detailed discussion on *śakti*, the denotative function of a word, and how it is apprehended is found elsewhere:

The manner in which verbal comprehension takes place is being shown. ... It is not that words actually being known are the instrument of it; for we have verbal comprehension even in the absence of words (uttered), as in the case of a man under the vow of silence mentally reciting a verse, and so on. ... The recollection of the meaning of words produced by those words is the operation. Otherwise a man who has a knowledge of words would have verbal comprehension even when he has a knowledge of the thing denoted by the words, through perception etc. Even there the recollection should be understood as being produced by words through their significatory function (*vyrtti*). Otherwise, when words like 'jar' have given rise to a recollection of ether through the relation of inherence, ether too would become an object of verbal comprehension. Significatory function is the relation consisting in either denotative function (*śakti*) or implication (*lakṣaṇā*). It is in this that the knowledge of denotative function has utility. Because, unless denotative function is first known, there would be no recollection through the association of words even if there be a knowledge of them. For the knowledge of words reminds us of their meaning by virtue of being the knowledge of either of two related things. ... Denotative function is the relation of a word to its meaning. It is of the form of a divine will that such and such a word should denote such and such a thing. Recent names also do possess denotative function; for (behind them) there is the divine will; 'On the eleventh day a father should name his child.' One school holds that recent names possess no denotative function. The new school, however, maintains that it is not the divine will that constitutes denotative function, but any will. Hence even recent names certainly possess denotative function. The knowledge of it, however, is derived from a grammar etc. Witness the following: 'The elders say that denotative function is apprehended from grammar, comparison, dictionary,

statement of trustworthy persons, usage, supplementary statement, paraphrase, and the contiguity of a well-known word.³⁹

Further, by statements like 'a brahmana should not be killed', the killing of a brahmana out of anger is prohibited and no action is prescribed. In statements of daily parlance like 'this is blue and not red', the meaning arising out of previous experience of understanding of these words cannot be easily concealed. Statements like, 'Codanālakṣaṇo'rtho dharmah; dharma is that which is indicated by (known by means of) the Veda as conducive to the highest good',⁴⁰ state that dharma gives injunctions for the performance of actions. Even the sutra, 'Tadbhūtānām kriyārthena sāmāmnāyo'rthasya tannimittatvāt; (in the sentence) there is only a predication (or mention) of words with definite denotations along with a word denoting an action, as the meaning (of the sentence) is based upon that (the meaning of the words)' (I.1.25), is thus commented upon: 'The words which are contiguous to passages of injunction and convey that which is to be accomplished are to be construed as being one with the passages of injunction, because from the syntactical connection, *samabhiṣyāhara*⁴¹, of that which is to be established, *siddha*, and that which has been established, it is only proper that the deduction of the meaning of the words denoting that which has been established should be construed as that which is to be established.' The idea is that whenever in the Vedas we encounter some passages that do not directly instruct us to perform a sacrifice, but such passages are contiguous to passages that instruct the performance of sacrifices, we have to take the former type of passages to be complementary to injunctive passages. Why should these passages be so construed? Suppose we have to accomplish something and a person tells us that once our goal is

accomplished we will be in such and such a state. What meaning do we make of this person's talk? We can only infer that this person is coaxing us to accomplish our goal. Let us take the example of the Bhagavadgita. In the second chapter, in verses 55 to 72, Sri Krishna describes the characteristics of a *stithaprajña*, a person of steady wisdom. Tradition has it that though they are the qualities of a knower of Brahman, they are the disciplines to be practised by an aspirant of the knowledge of Brahman. In the present context too we have to understand the meaning in this manner. Thus, it is established that not the entire part of the Vedas is injunctive in nature. This is the meaning obtained from the sutra placing this objection: 'Āmnāyasya kriyārthatvād-ānarthakya matadarthānāṁ tasmād-anityamucyate; (objection) the purpose of the Veda lying in the enjoining of actions, those parts of the Veda that do not serve that purpose are useless; in these therefore the Veda is declared to be non-eternal (unreliable).'⁴² This is the true opinion of Jaimini, which has not been properly understood by these schools of thought.

(To be continued)

References

36. The six auxiliary disciplines of Vedas called *vedāṅgas*: *śikṣā*, phonetics; *kalpa*, rituals; *vyākaraṇa*, grammar; *nirukta*, etymology; *chanda*, metre; and *jyotiṣa*, astronomy. The study of these disciplines is considered essential to understand the Vedas.
37. *Isha Upanishad*, 2.
38. *Yogavashishtha Ramayana*, 1.7.
39. *Vishvanatha Nyaya Panchanana, Bhasha Parichcheda* with Siddhanta Muktaṭṭi, verse 81. The translation is from *Bhāṣā Pariccheda*, trans. Swami Madhavananda, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 148. Also see *Annambhata, Tarkasamgraha* with Dipika, 8.1.
40. *Mimamsa Sutra*, 1.1.2.
41. *Laugakshi Bhaskara, Arthasamgraha*, 22.
42. *Mimamsa Sutra*, 1.2.1.

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Swami Vivekananda: An Intuitive Scientist

Dr T G K Murthy

Sri Nityananda Prakashana, # 46,
4th Cross, Ashoknagar, BSK 1st Stage,
Bangalore 560 050. Email: murty.tgk@gmail.com. 2011. xvi + 128 pp. ₹ 40.

According to Swami Vivekananda, instinct, reason, and intuition are the three means of knowledge. While instinct and, to some extent, reason comes unsought to all, intuition, through which one arrives at the truth about a thing without going through the tedious logical methods, lies dormant in most people. What awakens intuition? Here no infallible method can be laid down, as intuition, by its very definition, transcends reason. Still, those who have achieved considerable progress in spiritual life are invariably endowed with a high degree of intuition. However, as the author points out, intuition is not the property of spiritual people alone.

The multifaceted genius of Swamiji, who made keen and ground-breaking observations on various aspects of human nature and culture, can only be accounted for by an enormous power of intuition. In the first part of the book the author, who is a scientist, discusses a few of Swamiji's intuitive remarks pertaining to physics, chemistry, and life sciences in the light of vast developments that have taken place in these fields. Swamiji proclaimed the Vedantic view that both *akasha*, universal matter, and *prana*, universal energy, are evolutes of *mahat*, cosmic mind. Nicola Tesla, who was privileged to hear Swamiji on the subject, could not fulfil his promise of arriving at a mathematical demonstration of the inter-convertibility of matter and energy. The author has shown how the theory of relativity has vindicated Swamiji's assertions.

Speaking of chemistry, Swamiji often said that the ultimate objective in this field is to find the

one substance from which all the rest are derived. Citing the views of a number of renowned scientists, the author points out that hydrogen is now increasingly being thought of as that one basic element. As for Darwin's theory of evolution, Swamiji said that though it can be accepted to explain the animal kingdom, the theory falls short when it comes to human society. The author has quoted a few scientists who differ from Darwin, thereby lending support to Swamiji's views.

The second part of the book discusses the crucial role that intuition can play in management, medicine, and education. Proper references are missing for the quotations from Swamiji's works and that of the scientists. On page 27, in the last sentence, the author misquotes Swamiji. The author would do well to make the necessary alterations in subsequent editions.

As the world is celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, such works wherein learned people interpret Swamiji's thoughts from their respective field of specialization are highly welcome.

Brahmachari Shantichaitanya

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban



The Ultimate Love Affair: Vedanta and the Search for God

Leta Jane Lewis

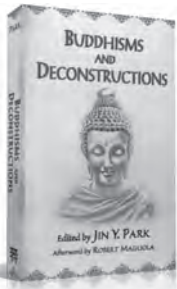
Vedanta Press, 1946 Vedanta Place,
Hollywood, CA 90068. Website:
www.vedanta.com. 2009. 233 pp. US
\$ 15.95.

It is generally believed that people come across Vedanta by chance, but inner struggles and a search of meaning in life brings one to Vedanta. It is only when such conditions pre-exist that Vedanta profoundly alters one's life. It is the ultimate love affair! As in the deepest and truest love all

ideas of separation are obliterated, similarly one's provisional individuality is transcended in the ultimate Reality.

The Ultimate Love Affair: Vedanta and the Search for God is the accumulated wisdom and experience of the author's long devotion to Vedanta. She also discusses important Vedanta concepts from the perspectives of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions. It is apparent that the learned author views and reverentially approaches Vedanta through the combined personalities of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

PB



Buddhisms and Deconstructions

Ed. Jin Y Park

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mlbdc.com. 2011. xxii + 290 pp. ₹ 495.

Though a wide chasm separates the East and the West—cultural backgrounds, economic positions, social outlooks, religious moorings, and philosophical overviews—a distinct strand of similarity is detected in the spiritual thought-processes and utterances of mystics and metaphysicians of the Orient and the Occident. This fact conclusively proves that all great minds think alike. In today's world the philosophical discourse can be better executed and its results become more meaningful thanks to the exchange of ideas among different cultures. Moreover, with the neglect of classical philosophical thoughts everywhere, people are tending more towards science and technology, which is upending philosophy. Hence, research scholars are increasingly seeking philosophic insights outside their own systems in order to keep philosophical interest ablaze.

Buddhisms and Deconstructions is written predominantly for the scholar-specialist's delight, though the general reader, with a penchant for philosophical analysis and research, can find enough material to tickle and satisfy his or her appetite. The thirteen essays contained in the volume bear the imprints of superb scholarship and sparkling exposition of nimble and trained minds.

The volume is a veritable intellectual theatre in which the profound ideas of Buddha and the vibrant views of the Madhyamika exponent Nagarjuna are admirably compared with the daring philosophical flights of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Jin Y Park deserves the warmest congratulations for stringing together these splendid essays into a philosophical garland—to be offered to philosophy buffs.

The tremendous scope and vast field of the book's comparative study is definitively eye-opening. Jin Y Park observes in the introduction: 'The current volume begins by outlining the ground of comparison between Buddhism and deconstructions and prepares the reader for other chapters in the volume' (xvi). The essays are grouped under six parts with an 'Afterword' by Robert Magliola. In the first part Jin Y Park sets the tone by investigating the 'spirit' shared in this philosophical endeavour. Park illumines the nature of deconstructive philosophy as she discusses the Buddhist 'middle path' and *pratityasamutpada*, dependent co-arising, in comparison with the Derridean 'middle voice' and '*différance*'. The next essay, by Ian Mabbet, further delineates the basic similarities, or resemblances, of these two philosophies; he juxtaposes the Indian Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna with the deconstructive operation, which he does not limit only to the Derridean, by summarizing their similarities on eight points. 'Park and Mabbet focus their discussions on the similarities between Buddhism and deconstruction, thus preparing us to think about the possibilities for comparative studies. These similarities will be further explored in Part Two, where the authors also bring our attention to the major differences between Buddhism and deconstruction' (5).

The Introduction to Part II opens with this statement: 'The essays in Part Two provide in-depth investigations on the thematic similarities between Buddhism and deconstruction along with contemplations on their differences' (43). The two essays of this part, 'Derridean and Mādhyamika Buddhist Theories of Deconstruction' by Zong-qi Cai and 'Indra's Postmodern Net' by David R Loy, are profound. The essays in Part Three breach an important issue in understanding not only the relationship between Buddhism and

deconstruction but also what can be categorized as 'non-substantialist philosophy'. The essays in Part Four delve into the coexistence of the deconstructive and un-deconstructive aspects of our mode of thinking. This coexistence has been a concern for Chan Buddhism, the history of which reveals the process of the school's constant self-examination in the face of the substantializing and essentializing tendency of the human mind. The essays discuss two such instances in Chan Buddhism: the establishment of the southern/sudden school of Chan during the formative period of Chan Buddhism, and the use of a question and answer technique known as *gong'an*. The themes treated in Part Five locate Robert Magliola's work in the 'differential space' between Buddhism and Christianity, Eastern practice and Western intellect, and philosophy and experience. Jane Augustine describes Magliola's deconstructive literary style as arising from his meditations on the Buddhist *shunyata*, emptiness. Unlike Augustine, who confirms the possibility of ethical commitment in Magliola's Buddhist deconstruction, Gad Horowitz criticizes Magliola's deconstruction in particular and Buddhism in general for their failure to provide a source of ethical obligation for individuals. In Jin Y Park's introduction to Part Six, she says that 'deconstruction is a point reached through the long process of Western metaphysics' self-de-essentializing practice. Two essays in Part Six demonstrate the wide range of this procedure by discussing Buddhist thought alongside pre-Derridean philosophies, especially in connection with existentialism and phenomenology' (193). In the concluding essay, 'Zen Flesh, Bones, and Blood: Deconstructing Inter-Religious Dialogue', E H Jarow draws our attention to the problematic nature of comparative study itself.

This anthology of scholarly essays by experts in the philosophy of Buddhism and Derridean deconstruction is a highly stimulating intellectual repast for specialists in comparative philosophy. Today deconstructionism, in addition to philosophy and literature, is also employed in theology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, political studies, and many other fields.

N Hariharan
Madurai



Lessons Life Has Taught Me

J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411 001. Website: www.dadavasvanibooks.org. 288 pp. Price not mentioned.

Through the present book the author aims at re-instilling in us the ethical, cultural, and spiritual values that are ingrained in the very soul of Indian life and are fast sinking into oblivion. Caught up in a vortex of ceaseless cravings humans are running hither and thither at a tremendous pace to satisfy their insatiable lust for power and pelf, pleasures and possessions.

In this scenario *Lessons Life Has Taught Me* convey a message of hope, faith, and strength—a way to fulfil our divine destiny. It contains the essence of the profound wisdom of great sages and thinkers of the world. It teaches the unity of all in one cosmic Existence, to serve all, and to have love and sympathy for all. Dadaji teaches us to accept any calamity or misfortune as ordained from the Will Divine to teach us some great lesson. How full of assurance are his words: 'God is our one unfailing companion. He will never leave us. ... Whatever happens in the Divine Providence happens for our good. ... Misfortunes are blessings if we handle them well. Not unoften, problems become the door through which God enters our life' (9–11). He teaches us the sublime truths contained in the Upanishads in lessons like this: 'The aim of life is to realize that we are immortal spirits—not the bodies we wear. ... An infinite potential lies hid within us. We are unaware of it, because we think of ourselves as limited, restricted creatures. Our True Self is *Atman*' (12).

There are in this book many precepts to ponder over. But reading is not enough; we have to practise these teachings. And to make an indelible impression on our minds, each of these teachings is illustrated with an inspiring story. The 'lessons' are further enriched by adding some 'Words of Wisdom' of philosophers and saints from the East and the West, as well as practical tips. These lessons can touch and appeal to sensitive hearts.

Sudesh Garg
Chandigarh

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bhubaneswar:** Personality development camp from 6 to 8 May 2012, in which 130 students took part, and a two-day programme comprising discourses and devotional singing from 26 to 28 May, attended by about 350 persons daily. **Chandigarh:** Guided meditation, a lecture on Swamiji, and free distribution of books to 100 teachers of four schools in Patiala on 29 May. **Cherrapunjee:** Youth convention on 12 May, attended by nearly 500 students and presided by Sri Bindoo M Lanong, deputy chief minister of Meghalaya. **Delhi:** A programme of devotional music was organized on 15 April, and on 6 May, Smt Sheila Dikshit, chief minister of Delhi, handed over the 'Swami Vivekananda Award', instituted by Delhi ashrama, to four NGOs for their outstanding service to the poor and underprivileged. **Lucknow:** A youth programme on 27 May, in which nearly 400 youths from various educational institutions in and around Lucknow took part. **Ponnampet:** A workshop for tribals on 22 May, in which about 150 tribals from different villages of Virajpet Taluk participated. **Providence (USA):** A three-day programme comprising a monastic conference, a symposium on 'Facets of Swami Vivekananda's Message', lectures, and musical performances from 20 to 22 April. **Quilandy:** Personality development camp from 4 to 6 May, in which 35 students took part. **Rajkot:** Thirteen spiritual retreats in different parts



Monks' conference at Providence

of Gujarat from 24 April to 8 May, which were attended by nearly 2,500 persons. **Ranchi Sanatorium:** Youth convention on 29 April, in which about 250 youths participated.

Foundation Day

The 116th Foundation Day of the Ramakrishna Mission was celebrated at Belur Math on 1 May. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, chaired the meeting and Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission delivered the welcome address. Swamis Suhitananda, Suvirananda, Girishananda, and a few others addressed the gathering.

New Office-Bearers

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj has been elected a Vice President and Swami Suhitananda the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. They assumed their respective offices on 6 May, the sacred Buddha Purnima Day.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, has introduced an annual award called 'Vivekananda Sevak Award' for the ashrama's best employee of the year. The first award, carrying a sum of ₹ 10,000, a citation, and a shawl, was presented to Sri Rakesh Chandrakar on 29 April.



New shrine at Providence

The newly constructed shrine-chapel at **Vedanta Society, Providence** (USA) was inaugurated on 21 April.

The following centres conducted summer camps for students, which included chanting, bhajans, moral lessons, yogasanas, and other activities.

Centre	Period	Students / Age
Hyderabad*	30 April to 27 May	800 / 11-15
Kanpur	13 to 20 May	125 / children
Kochi	20 to 29 April	32 / 11-17
Ponnampet	1 to 8 May	127 / 10-16
Rajkot	1 to 31 May	96 / 7-13

* Motivation training for 100 parents was also conducted during the period

Achievements

In recognition of the excellent education provided by the Polytechnic College of **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai**, the National Institution for Quality and Reliability (NIQR), Chennai, selected the Polytechnic College for the NIQR-TVN 'Kidao Outstanding Educational Institution Award, 2012'. Sri K Rosaiah, governor of Tamil Nadu, presented the award, comprising of a citation and a silver plaque, in a function held on 21 April.

Relief

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Belgharia:** 941 saris, 510 dhotis, 256 lungis, 1,457 shirts, 1,323 pants, 1,113 frocks, 315 sets of salwar-kameez, 213



Inauguration of the new shrine at Providence

woollen garments, and 300 blankets among 728 families of 15 villages in Bankura, Paschim Medinipur, and Hooghly districts; **Vrindaban:** 1,200 kg rice, 1,200 kg wheat flour, 300 kg pulses, 300 kg mustard oil, 600 kg salt, and 150 kg sugar among 600 elderly widows of Vrindaban.

Drought Relief • **Pune** centre distributed drinking water to about 45,000 persons affected by acute water scarcity in 6 villages of Solapur district and 9 villages of Ahmednagar district.

Hailstorm Relief • **Malda** centre supplied hut-building materials—640 bamboos, 22,600 roof tiles, and other items—to 52 families of Khaspara village in Malda district whose dwellings had been severely damaged in the destructive hailstorm last month.

Tornado Relief • In the wake of the powerful tornado that had hit northern Bangladesh in the month of April, **Dinajpur** centre distributed 672 kg rice, 24 plates, 50 buckets, and 43 dhotis among 136 affected families of 7 villages in Thakurgaon district of Bangladesh.

Flood Relief • **Nadi** (Fiji) centre continued its primary relief work in Western Viti Levu in Fiji. The centre further distributed 2,730 lunch parcels among needy students and is handing over 10,000 exercise books and stationery goods among 1,200 students of 10 schools in flood-affected areas.

Fire Relief • **Itanagar** centre distributed 18 sets of utility items (each set containing a steel trunk, a bed-sheet, a plastic mat, two buckets, a tawa (griddle), cooking vessels, ladles, a mug, a plate, a tumbler, candles, bathing soap, washing soap, matchboxes, toothpaste, toothbrush, and other items) among families whose houses had been gutted by a devastating fire in the Barapani area of Naharlagun district.

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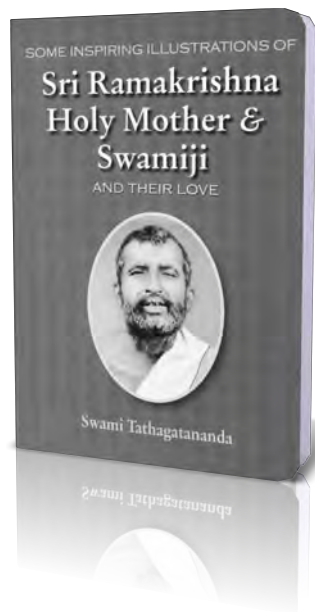
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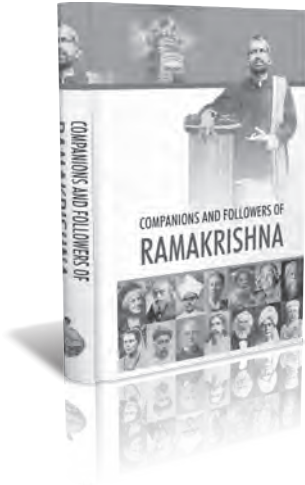
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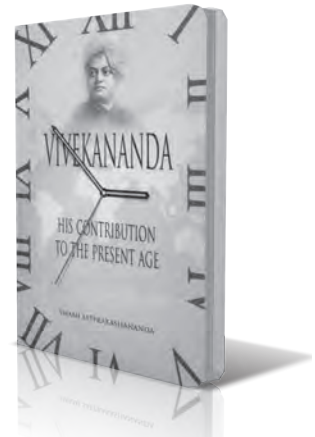
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